

(SLIGHTLY EDITED and MODERNIZED)

MOSES:

HIS LIFE AND ITS LESSONS

BY THE REV.

MARK GUY PEARSE

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CONTENTS

	I.	<i>Page</i>
<i>THE LITTLE CHILD</i>		—
	II.	
<i>YOUTH AND MANHOOD</i>		—
	III.	
<i>THE FORTY YEARS IN MIDIAN</i>		—
	IV.	
<i>THE SECOND APPEARANCE AS THE DELIVERER</i>		—
	V.	
<i>SERVICE</i>		—
	VI.	
<i>SERVICE</i>		—
	VII.	
<i>HALF-WAY HOUSE</i>		—
	VIII.	
<i>THE PLAGUES</i>		—
	IX.	
<i>THE LAST PLAGUE</i>		—
	X.	
<i>THE INSTITUTION OF THE PASSOVER</i>		—
	XI.	
<i>ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE</i>		—
	XII.	
<i>MARAH AND ELIM</i>		—
	XIII.	
<i>THE MANNA</i>		—
	XIV.	
<i>WANTS AND WARS</i>		—
	XV.	
<i>COMFORT AND REST</i>		—
	XVI.	
<i>SINAI</i>		—
	XVII.	
<i>THE ANGEL AND THE WAY</i>		—
	XVIII.	
<i>THE VISION OF GOD</i>		—
	XIX.	
<i>THE STORY OF THE GOLDEN CALF</i>		—
	XX.	
<i>THE FAITHFUL MEDIATOR</i>		—
	XXI.	
<i>THE PRAYER OF MOSES AND ITS ANSWER</i>		—
	XXII.	
<i>FROM SINAI TO THE WATERS OF MERIBAH</i>		—
	XXIII.	
<i>THE SERPENTS IN THE WILDERNESS</i>		—
	XXIV.	
<i>BALAAM</i>		—
	XXV.	
<i>THE DEATH OF MOSES</i>		—

THE LITTLE CHILD

“And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, ‘Because I drew him out of the water.’” —Exodus 2:10 [NKJV]

IN commencing our study of the life of Moses we need but very few words of introduction. A life so noble and so devoted cannot fail to stimulate and strengthen us. This triumphant faith, this sublime patience, this unfaltering courage must minister to the highest life of the soul. And throughout these chapters it is not Moses only of whom I want us to think, but also of ourselves,—not of the dead past but of the living present. I want to get down to that abiding truth which concerns every one of us here and now. The Bible could never be what it is to men if it were only the record of how God dealt with the world some thousands of years ago. It is the revelation of how God is still dealing with the world: the revelation of the great principles of the Divine procedure; the manifestation of a love and power and wisdom that have to do with us today as much as with Moses in Egypt.

The story opens with an account of the sorrows of Israel at this time. An interval of some four hundred years lies between the Books of Genesis and Exodus, between the going down of Jacob into Egypt and the birth of Moses. That “going down” was a much more important matter than a hasty reading of the earlier verses would lead us to think. “Seventy souls” represent the descendants from Jacob; but every man’s *household* adds very greatly to the company. When we remember that Abraham had three hundred and eighteen armed men in his house, we get an idea of the position of these chieftains and their following. In all, it would probably be a company of some three or four thousand persons that went down with Jacob. During the lapse of the centuries which had passed since their coming, they are supposed to have grown into a people numbering two million, and that in the midst of a nation of some six or seven million.

Joseph had long since died; and those who had no share in his benefits did not regard his brethren. Egypt was in danger of an invasion from the very land from which the Israelites had come —the forces of the enemy would first have to pass through the region of country where they lived. It was naturally a cause of much fear that the Israelites would join the enemy and surrender to them the rich tract of land on which they had settled, and also swell the forces against Egypt. So this Pharaoh resolved to get rid of the nation. They were called from their work as shepherds to labour in building the cities; they were made slaves, burdened and beaten. Beneath the fierce sun they had to quarry the stones and drag the huge burdens to the wall, while the taskmasters with whips and curses urged them in their toil. Or they had to work in the slime pits, shaping the clay and making the bricks, serving with rigour, their lives made bitter. But this drudgery did not diminish their numbers. The more they were afflicted the more they multiplied and grew. Pharaoh then resolved on more desperate measures, and directed that the nurses should kill the males at their birth. But this failed —the nurses feared God more than they feared Pharaoh. And now the edict is issued that every male child should be thrown into the river. The daughters should be saved; but their safety meant a life even more dreadful than the fate of the sons.

Now it is at such a time that, in one of the Hebrew households, a child as beautiful as day is born. The good man and his wife already had a son and a daughter, but this little one was no less dear on that account. Thank God, it needs not much beauty for any mother to think her little one exceeding beautiful, but this child seems to have been of marvellous beauty. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child [“a *proper* child—a perfect child”]; and Stephen uses the same word in Acts 7:20: “At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God.” [“exceeding fair” or, as the margin has it, “*fair to God.*”]

Over this little one so dear, so beautiful, there stretched the cruel hand of the law—he should be cast into the river. Ah! what hours were they when the mother looked upon her son with breaking heart until her eyes were blinded by her grief. How she started at the sound of footsteps, dreading the coming of the executioner. How she hushed his cry lest the passerby should betray her secret. How it haunted her day and night—the scene of those dreadful waters where the creatures lay waiting for their prey—until it seemed better to long for the child's death than his life. How sometimes she dreaded that the end was come, the child was torn from her breast and flung into the river; and waking with a shriek, she stretched out eager hands for the little one, and laid him right against her heart, and feared to sleep again lest he should suffer.

And thus, dear friends, we too may dwell earnestly and sadly upon the perils that beset our children. Within them are a thousand dreadful possibilities—the power of evil, subtle and incessant, leading them astray. Outside there waits for them a world full of snares and temptations. Alas, at home also they are apt to suffer—the victims at times of a love foolish in its goodness and too indulgent, and now of some annoyance in which the punishment is altogether out of proportion to the real offence. Do not let us put away the thought of these perils, great and almost numberless: perils beside which that river and its waiting beasts of prey are but a little. Go into our prisons and see who fill them. Go into the public-houses and see the faces stamped and branded with drink; the brutal husband and father; the mother hardened, deadened to almost everything but the craving for the accursed drink. Go into the streets and see the wretched ones in their gaiety who lurk and linger at its corners. All these, the betrayers and their victims, were the little children of but a few years ago—little children over whom mothers hung with fond hope and glowing desire. We too, like this mother of old, may well shrink and fear because of the perils that beset our children.

But let us turn again to our story. *These perils drove her to God.* This mother gets among the splendid heroes of the world by her victory over these very perils. We find her, and her husband too, having a place in that roll-call of honour in connection with this event—"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command" (Hebrews 11:23). This mother took hold of God on her child's behalf, and she kept hold of Him. And there, as she kneeled and pleaded, she seems to have received some Divine intimation of what the little child was going to do and to be. The decree of the haughty Pharaoh had gone out that all the sons of the Hebrews shall be cast into the river; and yet from these very sons shall rise up one whom the king's daughter shall adopt and train and educate as a prince; and he shall be the means of overthrowing Pharaoh and all the host of chariots and horsemen, and of bringing the people forth into the land of promise with a great deliverance.

As she kneels before God, the God of Israel, we can think that her dreams are sometimes of one who stands with his hands stretched over the water, and they divide and let the host of Israel go through triumphant, leaving for ever the land of bondage; of one who stands again with his hands stretched out, and those waters that were upheld like crystal walls, sweep down upon the armies of Egypt. Does she hear the voice of little Miriam singing, "*God blew with His breath, the sea covered them. They sank as lead in the mighty waters*"? Oh, press him to your heart, mother, and let fair visions fill your soul as you thank God that a man-child has been born to you by whom God shall do greater things than you could ever ask or think.

By all means let us think of the dangers that surround our children. *But let the perils drive us to the Throne of Grace.* There we shall find the *other* side. Every child that is born into the world partakes of evil; but know this also, that every child born into the world partakes of grace. By all means, talk about original sin—that there's a tendency to evil in the child. But talk about grace too. Never a child is born into the world but it is God's child,—dear to the very heart of God, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, heir of the kingdom of Heaven. We all believe it if the little one dies. Why not believe it when the child lives? Is Death the great Sanctifier, or is it only the children that die whom God loves? O mother, father, I want you to not only have fear of peril for your children; but find hope in the love and grace of our God, as

did this mother of old. Go to your prisons, your public-houses, your dens of infamy and see the children of some few years ago. *But don't go only there.* Go to the churches too; go to the philanthropic work, to the thousand forms of benevolent agencies, to the tens and thousands of men and women who are helping to make this world better. These, too, were the little children of some few years ago. These are the blessed possibilities that lie within the little ones of today. Like this mother of old, let us come boldly to God and claim His help. Our children are dear to Him as was this child of long ago. He has a thousand gracious promises for us. Take hold of them as your own. Greater than the forces of evil within or about them is that which is within our reach—the help and blessing of our God. Count what you and your children have in Him. Here are hopes great and splendid as the love of God; strong and glorious as the grace of Christ; real and mighty as the blessed Spirit's power. Let fear watch: there are perils. Let faith be glad : we have the Almighty Father to help us.

Now comes the next chapter of our story. *The child can be no longer hidden.* It may have been that her secret was discovered, that some unfriendly eye had seen the little one; or that the time for searching the houses of the Israelites had come. The poor mother, driven to her wits' end, is yet only driven nearer to God for help. Does she remember how once before the household of God had been in danger of perishing from water?—that God had commanded an ark to be built for the saving of that house; and how that thus floating on the waters of destruction His servants outrode the perils and stepped forth by and by as into a new heaven and a new earth. In similar peril she will have similar faith, and will seek a similar deliverance. Under cover of night the father goes forth to the river's brink to gather the great water-flags that grow there; then creeps cautiously back with his burden. The mother and trusty Miriam are busy braiding the broad leaves together to form a basket. How often the eye is turned towards the goodly child lying all unaware of the danger that awaits him; and a great sigh goes up from the troubled heart. Then the basket is made watertight by the coating of pitch. And now with faintest break of day the hour has come. For the last time, as she may think, the little one lies against his mother's heart. Setting the child within the basket she hurries away to the river, and lays it down at the water's edge amidst the tall reeds. She lingers a moment to look at that sweet face—so lonely, so helpless, exposed to so many perils, with none to help him—save only God. Then leaving little Miriam to watch, she goes home to kneel alone and plead with the Most High.

So there comes a time in the history of every boy and girl when *they cannot be hid.* Screened and guarded tenderly at home, sooner or later they must go forth—to school, to business, to service; lonely, exposed to many perils. Well, what then? We must do for our children what the parents did for this little one. We must weave the promises of God into an ark of safety and lay them down in it. Let our prayer fashion the ark of their deliverance out of God's tender care and love. It is ours to put them right into the arms of God. A mother's prayers are the children's best protection. The tender love of the Heavenly Father, His gracious care and promises, are the blessed material with which we may build the ark—they are ever waiting for us beside the river of God which is full of water.

And now the dreary minutes pass slowly away; the mother's heart torn between hope and fear—faith looking up to God, and then fear staying to listen to its own whispers. How can she dare to hope for the child? Wild beasts and floods and cruel foes lie all around her little one. Yet faith looks up again and feels that all is right. God is above them all, and she can trust her little one to His care.

Forth from the palace comes the king's daughter, and goes down to the river. As she walks along the banks with her maidens she sees the strange basket laid in the reeds, and little dreaming what is in it she bids one fetch it. And there when it was opened she found the little sleeping child. Roused by the sudden light, and frightened by the many faces that gathered to look down upon it, the child cried. At once with womanly tenderness she took the little baby, and seeing its beauty she said, "This is one of the Hebrew children." Then trusty Miriam stepped forward, and eagerly asked, "Shall I go and call a nurse from the Hebrew women, that

she may nurse the child for you?" And presently the panting messenger burst in upon the mother, and told her all this wonderful story.

Look at it: for it is a sight worth looking at and lingering over until we can catch something of its blessedness for our own. There stands the mother with a joy that is almost overwhelming, taking her child from the arms of the king's daughter. "*Take away this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay you your wages.*"

"*For me!*" Ah, how safe is the little one now! The king's daughter cares for him and calls him her own. The perils that threaten him are powerless now. The decrees and threats of the king are spent and harmless now. *For me*, said the king's daughter. And those words wrapped the little one with safety. Now every soldier in the land would grasp his weapon for this his defence. All the wealth of Egypt ministered to his wants. All the might of Pharaoh was available for his protection. The poor child of the Hebrews is called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

There is a similar blessing for us in these words, if we can but rightly learn the lesson. They teach—that we may just take our children one by one, with all our fears, with all their weakness, and give them into the ark of His salvation, into the arms of His love, that He may embrace them with His mercy and lay His hands upon them. And then it is ours to receive them back from the hands of our God as a charge from Him, to be held as belonging to Him, and to be trained for His service. We must know it as true and real. It will avail us nothing to think about it as a pretty sentiment, a poetical idea. We must know it as a living reality: as real as the sins and temptations of life are real; as real as the daily and hourly cares that beset the soul;—that God Himself holds our children dear to His heart; that Christ the LORD calls them His little ones; that the Holy Spirit is come to dwell within them and make them wise unto salvation. All the great might and riches of our God are all available now, for every one of us in this work of training the children. Be true to this belief. Let hope and desire and faith be according to the greatness of this Love and in keeping with the provisions of His grace. Should the mother of this little child measure her ability by her husband's scanty earnings or by the product of their own little patch? No; it must be from the palace of the king that she must fetch his provision; his dress, his food, all his belongings must be in keeping with the dignity of a prince. All that the God of Heaven is, and all that He has is ours to draw upon for this work of training His little ones, whom He has trusted to our keeping.

II.

YOUTH AND MANHOOD

“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” —Acts 7:22

TO the little Hebrew household whose fortunes we are following, there comes now a greater sorrow than that which before had filled their hearts. Over the child there hung a deadlier peril. Even the waters of the Nile were less to be feared than the court of Pharaoh and all the temptations that there awaited Moses. The months have gone by, making her son more beautiful than ever to the mother's eyes; and every day seemed to leave him dearer. But he must go.

Let us remember how easy a thing it would be for the mother to hide him now. Amidst the crowds of the Hebrews, huddled together as they were in their affliction and poverty, they might have readily concealed themselves and their little one. In a few months he would have grown out of all recognition; and it would probably have been thought a thing much too small to make a great ado about—that one of these foolish people had taken the trouble to hide her child rather than let it be adopted by the king's daughter.

But the mother takes the child, a little wondering boy of some two or three years, and leaves him at the palace. It was a brave faith that wove the reeds together and made the ark of bulrushes and laid him down on the brink of the river and left him there, counting that God was able to deliver him from the perils of that hour. It was almost a braver faith that now took the little lad from the lowly home to the splendours of the palace, and left him in the hands of the daughter of Pharaoh, counting that God was able to deliver him through all the days of his youth and the years of his manhood. The relation of foster-mother, it is true, was continued with much intimacy, not only on the part of the nurse but of the family in which the child had been nursed, so that the influences of the Hebrew household would not by any means be cut off. Yet against this must be set the enticements of its luxury, its opportunities of self-indulgence, and the force of its example.

Stephen tells us concerning Moses that “he was learned in all the learning of the Egyptians.” What this phrase may mean is very vividly illustrated by Professor RAWLINSON in his *Life of Moses*. The greater part of his childhood was probably spent in the Palace of Memphis, and from its terraces he would look forth on the scenes which stirred his earliest thought. Before him opened the great city of Phthah, its colossal architecture rising up with vivid distinctness in that clear atmosphere. Throngs of busy people filled the streets and squares. On the river passed the laden ships, their sails gaily painted. About the temple moved the stately processions, headed by the priests resplendent in their robes, and sometimes in the midst of the crowd was led the sacred bull, while the strains of music floated on the air. Afar off on the verge of the desert rose the great pyramids, the tombs of the mighty kings.*

*Rawlinson, *Life of Moses*, page 23.

It was impossible that this child of the Hebrews could have been raised to such a position without being exposed to the jealousy of those about the king. Josephus tells us that on one occasion the Princess Thermuthis brought her little son into the presence of Pharaoh her father, that she might show him the beauty of the child and his brave spirit, and also in the hope that she might induce the king to make him his successor. The princess set the little lad upon the king's knee, and the king to humour her took off his crown and placed it on the child's head, whereon the child slipped from the king's knee and stood up. Then he took off the crown and set it on the ground, and lifting his little foot he tried to stand on it. In the royal presence was a famous scribe who had prophesied before the birth of Moses that there should come into the world about that time a Hebrew child who should lower the greatness of Egypt and triumph over her power. The scribe watched the child and then came forward and cried: “See, O King, the child of the Hebrews of whom the gods have warned us! He himself confirms

the prophecy. Has he not set thy sovereignty beneath his feet and sought to trample on thy crown? Kill him, that the Egyptians may cease to fear and that the Hebrews may cease to hope." Then the mother seized the child and hurried with him from the palace of the king, and thus, adds Josephus, "a second time was he delivered from death."

His very appearance seems to have been such that it arrested everybody's attention. That beauty of which the Scriptures speak is confirmed by tradition. So "goodly" to look at was he, so full of modesty and dignity, that as he passed along the streets all heads were turned to gaze on him. Tall, full of spirit, and capable of great endurance, and of such intelligence that he excelled in whatever he attempted, it was plain that this child was destined to be no ordinary man; and his presence filled the Egyptians with suspicion and gave to the Hebrews a new confidence.

The Egyptian training was fitted to turn the material of which this lad was made to the best account. Athletic games of all kinds developed both strength and courage. The mere matter of learning to read and write, so easy a thing with us, was in itself an education amongst the Egyptians. Their alphabet consisted of nearly a thousand characters, involving different combinations. Chinese is the only language of today which approaches it in difficulty. And the art of writing was yet much more difficult. The system of hieroglyphics really meant that writing became drawing. Pictures were in place of letters. Rawlinson gives us a list of birds with the letters for which they stood. An eagle represented the letter *A*; an owl *M*; a chicken *U*; a duck *SA*; a hawk *HAR*; a vulture *MUT*; and there were also a swallow and an ibis. Many of us who can write legibly might be puzzled to draw an eagle, an owl, a duck, and a swallow, so that at a glance one should be quite sure what it was meant for. Not birds only, but beasts, insects, and flowers had to be drawn with a firm, sure hand, artistically and rapidly. As to arithmetic, it is said that we owe our multiplication table to the Egyptians, and geometry and science of measurement could not fail to flourish where every year the landmarks were swept away by the overflowing of the Nile. Of astronomy they knew much; and their colossal architecture testifies to their skill in mechanics. Rhythm and poetry were the common study of the schools. Of Moses' skill in this respect we have evidence in his "Song," and in the poem at the end of Deuteronomy, and in the ninetieth and perhaps the ninety-first psalm. Music and dancing were also arts which the Egyptians cultivated with skill and care, and it is noteworthy that the song and the dance first find a place in the Bible in connection with Moses. There is no music in Genesis. We hear of one who has a harp and an organ, but the instruments themselves we do not hear; there is neither poet nor song.

Law and medicine are also to be reckoned amongst the things in which the Egyptians were learned, and in which Moses was trained. Nor could any learning have been of more value to him when he came to occupy the position of leader and judge of Israel. The laws of Egypt were for the most part admirable, and they were administered by trained judges. Nor was the king himself able to set aside the authority of the law. Sanitary regulations were enforced throughout the land, and the study of medicine and chemistry was carried by them far beyond the attainment of other nations.

Thus was Moses trained and fitted for the high position to which God had called him: he was learned in all the learning of the Egyptians.

Later in life, and when he had finished with the schools, there came another training that completed the fitness as leader of Israel. Stephen speaks of Moses as "*mighty in words and in deeds*"—that he occupied a foremost position in the land both as a statesman and warrior, foremost in influencing the course of events both at home and abroad. It is easy to believe that the soldier's life would have a peculiar charm to the high spirits and courage of this young prince, when as yet peace principles had not yet begun to be advocated. Every Egyptian monarch led out his army in person and himself fought at its head. And it seemed a fitting place for the son of Pharaoh's daughter. The military glory of Egypt had lately been increased by the great victories in Asia; and now in the war with Ethiopia, Moses found scope for his skill and courage.

Tradition, no doubt, has handed down to us what is merely fanciful as to his military career, but at the same time there is certainly much that confirms the words of Stephen. His skill in marshalling the hosts of Israel, and in leading them through the Red Sea and the desert; in choosing the places of their encampment and in directing it, all this was doubtless largely the result of his life in the battlefield, from his twentieth to his fortieth year. Josephus gives us a romantic story that probably has some foundation, though it may be difficult to say what.

“The Ethiopians, neighbours of the Egyptians upon the south, were in the habit of making inroads into their territory, and ravaging it from time to time. After a while they provoked the Egyptians to retaliate, and the latter marched an army into the land of the Ethiopians, to punish them for their insolence. But the Ethiopians gathered their forces together, and engaging the Egyptians in the open field completely defeated them, slaughtering a vast number, and forcing the rest to make a hasty and disgraceful retreat into their own country. It was now the turn of the Ethiopians to take the offensive. Following up the flying foe they crossed the border, and not content with ravaging, proceeded to seize and occupy large portions of southern Egypt. The inhabitants did not venture on resistance; and little by little the invaders crept on towards the north, till they reached Memphis and even the Mediterranean coast, without a single city having held out against their attack. Reduced to the depths of despair the Egyptians had recourse to their oracular shrines, and inquired of them what it would be best to do. The reply given by the oracles—*i.e.*, by the priests who had the control of them—was: ‘Use the Hebrew as your helper.’ No one doubted that by ‘the Hebrew’ was meant Moses, or that the ‘help’ to be required of him was that he should take the conduct of the war. Moses accordingly was invested with the sole command, and he marched into the enemy’s country at the head of the Egyptians troops. By an importation of ibises he got rid of the serpents that infested it and, in a decisive battle, defeated the army that was sent against him. He then went on and took city by city, everywhere overcoming the resistance that was offered to him, and slaying large numbers of the enemy. His troops, whom their reverses had disheartened, took courage as soon as they found that their new general could lead them to victory, and showed themselves excellent soldiers, ready to endure toil and danger alike.”

“Omitting embellishments and exaggerations,” adds Professor Rawlinson, “This much we may accept,—that Moses did become the commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army at a very critical time in its history.”

Such then was the position and character of Moses when he was forty years of age. He has secured all that Egypt could give him,—the highest position, a kingly power, the confidence and admiration of the people, boundless honour and wealth, possibly the prospect of the throne itself, opportunities for culture and knowledge such as could not be found elsewhere in all the world.

While Moses dwells in his position of such greatness, let us look for a moment at the condition of his brothers at this time. They toil away in the brickfields in the day. The fierce sun smites them with its rays, while at the same time fiercer taskmasters curse and beat these helpless slaves. Other companies drag the heavy burdens to the walls of the city,—they, too, beaten and cursed. Others again are in the fields, toiling their lives away in anguish. Such is the lot of Israel, a people degraded by their slavery, until hope itself has died out and their very spirit is broken. Now turn again to look at this Moses as he stands in the palace of Pharaoh. The man whose very face and form proclaim at once the poet, the warrior, the lawgiver, the statesman, the judge,—bequeathed with all gifts. About him are the tokens of his high position. Every luxury waits to minister to him; every pleasure is within his reach; all the treasures of wealth and learning are his, the charms of culture and the delicacies of the court. The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them lie at his feet. He looks forth over the stately city with its wealth and proud people. He sees in the distance the pyramids, where in time he may be laid to rest with kings. And in that clear air does he see afar off a company of the toilers burdened and beaten? Does he hear the cry of the taskmaster,—does he know that with

the word comes the blow? Look at it. See him as he steps down from the palace, and follow him as he goes away outside the city walls to join himself to the misfortunes of his poor brethren. “By faith Moses when he was come to years refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” (Hebrews 11:24-26)

Indeed, earth has no nobler story than this but one, and one only. There is another greater, more sublime,—the story of Christ who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, whom the angels worshipped, by whom God made the heavens, KING of kings, and LORD of lords. And lo! He looked upon us in our low estate, and for us men and for our salvation He who was rich became poor; that we through His poverty might be made rich. He came from an infinitely greater height, and stooped to an infinitely greater depth, taking upon Himself the curse of our sin, that He might lead forth the redeemed of the LORD.

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III.

THE FORTY YEARS IN MIDIAN

“ . . . I have been a stranger in a foreign land.” —Exodus 2:22

THERE had doubtless been given some divine revelation to Moses, of his call as the deliverer of his race. The faith spoken of in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews is in almost every case associated with such a revelation from heaven. He is now forty years of age, and if ever the deliverance of his people is to be accomplished the time is now. He is in the prime of his manhood. He has learned all that Egypt can teach him so as to be qualified for the work. He is at his best in both mind and body. The work is one which it may require years to accomplish. Now he will declare boldly what he is going to do. No more the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he is a Hebrew of the Hebrews. The blow that shall set his brothers free shall be struck in the name of God.

Look at him as he goes down into their midst! A lordly man was this Moses, fit for a throne—every inch a king. Handsome and noble in appearance, the eye flashing with indignation at the sight of the wrongs of Israel; his face proclaiming the great purpose which fills his soul, his tone and bearing catching the nobility of that achievement on which his heart is set, and to which he has given up everything. So comes this man into the midst of his brethren, The victorious warrior, Egypt's commander-in-chief, “a man mighty in words and deeds,” he is not one to be trifled with, brooking no defiance, and ready fiercely enough to avenge every insult. This is not the meek Moses, but Moses the prince, Moses the soldier, Moses the judge and the ruler.

So today he goes forth eager to rouse the people to perceive that God would deliver Israel by his hand. He comes upon a little group where an Israelite, burdened by a load that crushed him, has stumbled. Pitilessly the Egyptian taskmaster rains blows and curses upon him. The indignation of Moses is kindled in an instant. He hurls back the Egyptian, and when in self-defence the Egyptian struggles, the young prince smites him and kills him, and thrusts the body beneath the sand. Leaving that to teach these Hebrews what he had come to do for them, Moses goes on his way. “Surely,” he thinks within himself, “they shall discern such a sign of the times. These people are not to be beaten and enslaved—the people whom God has made free. One is come who shall lead them forth into the land of their fathers.”

He might well have looked that the elders of Israel should come to him as soon as this deed was whispered amongst them, and have spoken to him perhaps under cover of the night. But alas, faith is a hard matter with slaves. The dreary drudgery had slain their very hope and trust, and left only fear. The next day Moses came into their midst again, came upon two of them fighting together. We see the prince, the natural lord and ruler of men, as he steps between them, thrusting them apart, and turning to one of them he asks “Why are you striking your companion?” But there was no recognition of his position. There was no gratitude for the great sacrifice he had made for them. Of him, as of the greater than Moses, it was true—he was despised and rejected; he came unto his own, but his own received him not. Of him too was it true—neither did his brethren believe in him. Angrily the answer is flung at him, “What business is it of yours! Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?”

Think of this man whose soul is full of the great purpose of which he had dreamed, and for which he had set himself all the days of his life. Think of all the sublime visions dying instantly, melting into thin air. This was the people for whom he had sacrificed everything!

He turns away heavy-hearted. Shall he go back to the palace? That is impossible. Pharaoh has heard of his killing the Egyptian, and has discovered quickly enough, however blind the Hebrews may be, what his purpose is. Thus rejected of Israel he is persecuted by Pharaoh. His meddling has brought with it only failure. So it is that Moses turns and makes his escape, glad to leave behind him all sight of the land and wishing he could leave the memory of it too.

Except in the life of the LORD Jesus Christ Himself, I know of nothing in all history so unutterably pathetic as that flight. What does mother think? and Miriam, faithful Miriam, his sister? In this new sorrow does the brave mother's faith triumph still, and does she see him as she saw him long ago, standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire, singing the song of triumph—"You blew with Your breath: Your sea covered them: they sank like lead, like lead in the mighty waters"?

Like another Jacob he flies for his life, but in the greatness of his soul he's a whole heaven above Jacob. Think of him in that lonely flight, lying down at night in some hidden spot while the great stars come out overhead and look down on him, the prince of yesterday, accustomed to all honour and luxury, today hungry, homeless; and Pharaoh instead of being overthrown is seeking his life to take it away. His purposes not only lost, but ending in this! His hopes not only broken, but so bitterly and cruelly trampled under foot. All his great sacrifices not only of no avail, but bringing upon him such curse and misery. How now was Israel to be helped? Nowhere in all the stories of men is there anything to set beside this except in the story of the LORD from heaven. Following close on the strain and excitement of those days, what dark questionings must have assailed him in this loneliness; what gloomy temptations; what mocking laughter seemed to ring about him!

For many a day he pursues his lonely course, left only to his own thoughts, amid the hardships and perils of the journey. This is not a man like Elijah—used to hard fare and the scanty comforts of a cave. Moses comes from the palace, accustomed to the luxuries of a king.

At last he finds his way across the desert into the land of Sinai. He doesn't know that one day he will come that way again at the head of Israel's host, and on this very Sinai will take from the lips of God the great words which should shape the conscience of the ages and become the strength of the life of nations. He reaches the land of Ruel, the priest and king of Midian, and there seats himself beside the well. Then the daughters of the king come upon the scene,—according to the good custom of the land they were not bred in idleness, but trained as shepherdesses,—and they hasten to fill the troughs of the sheep. And when the rude Bedouins would have driven the shepherdesses back, and would have watered their own flocks first, this brave and gallant prince rose up for their protection, and helped them, and watered their flocks. The daughters carry the tidings, of this handsome stranger who had rendered such service, to their father. He welcomed Moses as his guest, and after a while he gave him his daughter Zipporah to wife. The name of the little son that is born to him has a sigh in it. He called the lad *Gershom*, for, said he, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."

For forty years he dwelt in this land as the shepherd. The life of Moses divides itself into three forties:—forty years in the palace of Pharaoh; forty years in Midian; and forty years as the leader and lawgiver of Israel. It may be that these years were the very happiest of his life. "Happy is the nation whose annals are dull." Thoughtful, and trained in all the learning of the Egyptians, this shepherd-life may have been altogether the happiest for Moses' body and mind and soul.

Look at its effect upon the character of Moses. What a contrast between the man who goes into the desert and the man who comes out of it! We saw him step forth from the palace as judge and ruler—a man born to command; and if he is not obeyed there is a sharp and ready method of dealing with the offender. Smite him, kill him if necessary. This young hero will not stand any nonsense; and watch yourself when his heart is on fire—he can shoot lightnings, forked and well-aimed. But his heart is saddened,—this fighting and smiting does not succeed. Then come the days of loneliness and disappointment softening him. This man must fail that he may succeed. Failure alone can fit such men for success. The life of the shepherd is gradually toning down the lordly ruler and making him more simple and brotherly. This communion with God in the solitudes has loosed him from himself. The very calling of the shepherd, day after day, has developed gentleness and kindly forethought and patience. He learns to walk slowly that the tired sheep may keep up with him. He, who was the fierce warrior, stoops to lift the little lamb and carry it in his bosom. Day after day he thinks only of the panting flock, searching out the shade for them, and leading them where they can

lie down in the green pasture. That's how this Moses come to be diffident, pitiful as a father, forbearing. So when God came to him with the great commission he has room for God, much room; he who was "mighty in deeds and in words" is afraid of himself. He is "not eloquent,"—who will obey him? Pharaoh will not hear him, nor Israel receive him. So Moses becomes the meekest of men. How? He has been to school. Where? In the wilderness. What for? That he may learn to lead the flock of God like a shepherd; that he may bear with them, and pity them, and be not only brave, but patient and gentle. Thus was he fitted for the great work that God had for him to do.

And then let us remember another great work which was probably accomplished at this time. Moses was not only called of God to make history, but to record that which was already made. He who was to be the leader of God's people was to tell how God had led them in the past. We owe Moses much for the book of Exodus; we certainly don't owe him less for the book of Genesis. Now, for this great achievement of his life, there was probably no opportunity,—either in the palace of Pharaoh,—or in the long life as the leader of Israel; but here (in Midian) was the perfect condition for such a work. A revelation direct from heaven probably commenced it,—and as St. John was led away to the lonely Patmos that he might record the visions which were given him, so may it have been that Moses was led up into the wilderness that he might write that which he sees. Moses, the author of the book of Genesis, is doing as much service as Moses the hero of the book of Exodus. What will Exodus avail us unless Genesis comes first? We can only get into the second book of Moses through the first. And here is the man trained in all the learning of the Egyptians, at once the *seer* and the *scribe*. Ear and eye alike opened, head and hand alike skilful, that he may rightly see and rightly record that which God shall show him. And here is the opportunity, as if it were spoken in this solitude—"What you see, write in a book."

Shall we then pity Moses in the desert? Shall we talk of the strange and unmeaning discipline of life? There is the answer of God. It was that the ages might have the orderly record of the creation and the story of the beginning of His dealings with the nations. And today, standing upon the sea of glass, and having the harp of God, I can think that the song of Moses has a sweeter note and richer fulness because of these forty years in the wilderness of Midian.

For us there is the great truth if we will but receive it. The Heavenly Father knows the right school to send us to if we will but learn the lessons. God knows how to make the best of us, if only we will let Him have His own way with us. Our only safety and blessedness is *to let Him have His own way with us perfectly.*

THE SECOND APPEARANCE AS THE DELIVERER

“Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring My people the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” —Exodus 3:10

AFTER the vision of God in the bush that burned with fire, Moses does not seem to have started at once for Egypt. We read in the nineteenth verse of the fourth chapter—“Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, ‘Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead.’” Now he seeks Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest and king of Midian, and asks his consent. The meekness of Moses appears in the request. He has had the wonderful visions of God; he has had the great commission for the deliverance of Israel from the might of Egypt; he has been entrusted with the power of miracles; but nothing of this is referred to as the reason of his departure. “Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive,”—this is all he asks. It may be that wisdom as well as lowliness made it possible.

Then he starts. His departure is marked by the same simplicity. No longer the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, he who was rich and for their sakes became poor, goes forth with all the tokens of poverty still. No doubt during these forty years in Midian he had obtained much wealth. There is no reason why we should not think of him as very rich in cattle and sheep and men-servants and maid-servants. But all unlike the return of Jacob from Laban is the departure of Moses from Midian. “Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.” The picture at once recalls another,—the flight into Egypt, when Joseph took the young Child and Mary His mother, and hastened from the cruel Herod. So Moses goes forth on his errand to spoil the Egyptians and to lead his people up into a goodly land flowing with milk and honey. It was a strange sight: going in such a lowly fashion to accomplish so great a triumph. Look at the faithful Moses trudging through the desert beside the ass on which was seated his wife and her little sons. Think again of the magnificence of Egypt: glance at its pride and splendour, that sense of massive and solid power which its architecture seems to embody, its hosts of horsemen and chariots, its cruel taskmasters. Did not the tempter meet the man of God in the wilderness mocking him, “What’s this feeble Jew doing?” A deliverer of Israel;—where is the prancing horse, where the armed men keeping rank, the wealth of gold and jewels, the host enthusiastic and defiant. Hell’s horrid laughter might well have rung out upon that silence. Here in this great stretch of sandy waste, amid the quivering air and in the fierce heat, goes this little group; an old man trudges wearily beside the ass on which is seated his wife and two little sons. No sign cheers him on his way. Look at it. Thus by faith Moses went forth to the overthrow of Pharaoh and for the triumph of Israel.

On the way Moses is overtaken by a serious illness. The Bible says, *The LORD sought to kill Moses.*” What does it mean? Jehovah, the God of Israel, has come down to command Moses to go out on an errand,—taxing to the uttermost his faith and skill and courage. He sets out, laying aside every weight and all that could hinder him. And then, the next thing we read is that *the LORD sought to kill him.* Is that his reward? Is that the result of obedience?

Let us look into it, for here we may notice another difficulty, about the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. There is the same suggestion of injustice in the record as it stands. That God should send Moses commanding Pharaoh to let Israel go, and then that he should harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he should refuse to let the people go! That he should keep smiting him with plague and pestilence and yet keep making him stubborn and defiant! This assuredly is not the God whom we have learnt to call our Father. Who of us could worship such a God, much less trust or love Him?

So then it is written, “the LORD sought to kill Moses”; what it probably means is that he was overtaken by some malady that threatened to prove fatal.

Like all Scripture, this word of is given to us by the inspiration of God. But inspiration does not destroy the ordinary methods of human thought and speech, or it would be wholly unintelligible. If the mind of God is to be made known in human speech it must be subject to the defects and limits of human speech, exactly as in choosing human agents and human instruments God takes men with all their natural defect and ignorance. It is often said that there is not a single Scripture character save the LORD Jesus Himself of whom no fault is recorded. It is not quite true, for of Joseph and Nehemiah and Daniel we do not find any fault. But broadly speaking it is true; and of course we all know that only in the case of the LORD Jesus Christ was the human life lived without sin. Now so is it that in making use of our human language God accepts it not only with the defective use of words, but with the imperfect and mistaken methods of thought which underlie the words. The sun rising and setting, the sun standing still, the corners of the earth,—what a stumbling-block such phrases must have been to sincere souls when science began to show that the world was not flat and had no corners, that the sun did not rise and set. It does not trouble us today, because in this matter we see how the Bible has accepted and used the popular speech and thought on these matters. Now think of a time and of a people to whom everything was a kind of fate, when free-will and the power of man to control circumstances was a thing unrecognised and unknown; when the simplest way to explain anything was that God did it, or the devil did it,—that if a man were sick God met him and sought to kill him, and if a man were obstinate and stubborn that God hardened his heart. Today human nature is the same as it was in Egypt and Israel, and God deals with men now as He dealt with them then. But today if a man is obstinate and defiant we do not say that God made him what he is. Thus as we have said, in choosing human language as the vehicle of Revelation, it could be only with the limits and defects and methods of human speech. Today amongst those Eastern nations the same notion lingers. “Why hurry? If you are to get there you will: if not, you won’t. It is fated, decreed.” But we say, “If you don’t make haste you will miss the train,” and blame the man, not fate, if he loiters and loses it.

The sickness of Moses sickness of Moses leads him to reflection, perhaps such as the greatness of his commission had somewhat interrupted or prevented. He remembers that the commandment of God in reference to his sons has been overlooked and delayed,—possibly in deference to his wife’s wishes, and now he directs her as to the fulfilment of this ceremony. She obeys, but ungraciously, rebelliously, and in angry scorn of her husband. Then Moses perceives that the errand on which he goes is one that will be better accomplished without the presence of his wife and children. He finds an opportunity of sending them back to the protection of his father-in-law, and he goes on alone.

Eagerly now would he begin to look for the coming of his brother, who is to be associated with him in this work and to whom a message had been given to go into the Mount of God and meet Moses. At last came the moment when these brothers met—they who had not seen each other for forty years. Each of them is now an old man and each is deeply impressed by the solemnity of the high work to which he is called. They would have much to tell of family matters, of the life in Midian, of the wife and sons, of the recent narrow escape from death, and most of all of the vision of the burning bush, and of the words of the LORD. Aaron’s story would be chiefly of the sorrows of Israel and of the new king and of the condition of Egypt;—never was the outlook darker; never was hope less. So do these brothers set out together, the first of that long line of united leadership in the Church where mutual sympathy and effort have so often proved that two may be much more than twice one. Thrown together now for the first time, they are to be henceforth not only fellow-workers, but united in heart and soul for forty years in that great work to which they have been called.

Carefully arranging their plans as they come, Moses and Aaron continue their journey to Egypt. They call together the heads of the people, the hereditary chiefs of the family. In Oriental countries, an alien race dwelling amongst the ruling nation is almost always permitted to have its chiefs or head-men, who control it, act on its behalf, and are the means of communication between it and the government.

It is easy to think with what eagerness of expectation they would gather in some secluded district where their coming together would be least exposed to observation. Expectation would be kindled within them even more, when they hear the message which the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has sent to them. He had seen their affliction. He had come down to deliver them out of the hand of Pharaoh. They were to be prepared for the refusal of Pharaoh and his angry scorn of this proposal. But God would smite Egypt with wonders and let them go; and enriched and adorned with the jewels of Egypt, Israel would march forth to the goodly land flowing with milk and honey. Then Moses went on to show them the signs by which they were to know that he came from God, the appointed proofs and credentials of his authority. It seemed like the beginnings of their deliverance. The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their afflictions, they bowed their heads and worshipped.

“*Afterwards*,” as it is written—with what interval we do not know,—Moses and Aaron went on their solemn and important mission before Pharaoh. They are described as both venerable men—Moses retaining much of the beauty which was so marked a feature of his early life, of whom it is recorded many years later that his eye was not dimmed nor his natural force abated. He is described as tall and dignified, with long streaming hair of a reddish hue and long shaggy beard.

It was a daring thing for these two men to present themselves at all in the presence of Pharaoh, and yet much more so on this errand. A man weak and capricious, arrogant, passionate, and cruel, he set himself on a level with the divinities of Egypt: took their titles to himself. He was the *LIVING ONE*—the *GIVER of LIFE*—the *GRACIOUS LORD*—the *GOOD GOD*. And here before this haughty monarch in the midst of his courtiers came the representative of these slaves with their demand. Brief and direct was the message they utter, peremptory almost and little in keeping with such language as Pharaoh alike demanded and received. “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”

Astonished at this audacity Pharaoh haughtily answered: “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go—”

The demand is repeated in the same tone, as of men who had seen the Living God and heard His voice. “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days’ journey into the desert and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.”

Indignant at this proposal Pharaoh turns upon him angrily, “why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor.” And thus they were driven from the face of the king.

This was bad enough; but worse was to follow, much worse. No penalties fell upon Pharaoh. The mighty wonders which were spoken of did not come. In all his pride and splendour he sat daily plotting more miseries for the helpless children of Israel. Calling together his servants who were set over the people he commanded them, “You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, ‘Let us go *and* sacrifice to our God.’”

This was a very heavy punishment to inflict upon the Hebrews. Many of them had to go and gather the straw from the fields, while the others were beaten unless they made up the full number of bricks. As all the straw was gathered that could be found near to the slime-pits they would have to go farther afield, and so the evil was perpetually increasing. Day by day this toil was greater, and yet the punishment increased for the taskmasters beat them with sticks. Little wonder that the people of Israel turned angrily upon Moses and Aaron, and flung it in their teeth. “You have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

Think of Elijah, stern Elijah flying from the face of Jezebel: sitting down under the juniper-tree and praying that he might die. If Jezebel lived and triumphed what good was life to him? What of his toils and perils if after all this woman was to sit and plot against the God

of Israel and His people? So sad, so bewildered, so cast down is Moses as he comes before the LORD. But fierce Elijah ran away *from* God. Moses ran away *to* God and poured out his sorrow before Him. “LORD, why have You brought trouble on this people? *Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.*”

We can understand what a bitter trial it was. To have the scornful upbraiding flung at them from the lips of those whom they had been sent to deliver. To find a place of the triumph they had expected, such cruel failure, such added misery. So Moses, cast down and disquieted, goes to pour out his complaint before God. The language of the forty-second Psalm might well have been his,—“I will say to God my Rock, ‘Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’ As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’”

Note well the answer to this depression. It is very beautiful. It is an illustration to the text, “As a father pities *his* children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him, for He knows our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust.” (Psalm 103:13-14)

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land. . . . And I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

God is never angry with us for doubting, or being depressed if our doubts and depressions do by *drive us to Him*. The only sorrow we have to fear is the sorrow that drives us from God.

SERVICE

"You cannot serve God and mammon." —Matthew 6:24

"Let My people go, that they may serve Me." —Exodus 8:1

THE people of Israel were out of their place. Nothing could be more widely different than where they were and where God would have them. Where they ought to be was Canaan,—the land of hills and valleys, the goodly land arched by a sky of deepest blue shaded and softened by the fleecy clouds, with swelling hills, and plans along which the shepherd leads his flock. Then dipping steeply towards the valley are the terraced vineyards with the luscious meadows where the cattle stand knee-deep in pasture, and the willows fringe the water-courses. Half-hidden in the leafy shelter stands the pleasant homestead; the busy master moves amongst the reapers where they bend over the corn. The hired servants have bread enough and to spare. The laugh of merry children and the chant of the psalm ring out upon the still air. And yonder in the distance are the towers of the Holy City, the place of their solemnities where they go up to wait upon the LORD. Look upon the picture and read beneath it the title,—*"Happy are you, O Israel,—who is like you, a people by the LORD?"* (Deut. 33:29)

That is where the LORD would have His people, and where He will lead them.

But where are they? No grassy meadows,—no fruitful valleys,—no happy laughter theirs. A sky of brass whence beats a pitiless heat; a dreary waste,—and in the fierce blaze of the sun a company of toiling slaves, bound and dragging at the burdens. Beside them the taskmaster savagely string at one and another. And yonder are the brick-makers in a very furnace of affliction,—they too beaten and abused,—their life a round of cruelty and hopeless toil. The Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour.

It is from the one scene to the other that God would lead His people. *"Let My people go, that they may serve Me."*

Now the difference between Egypt and Canaan is intended to illustrate what is meant by coming *"out of the world."* The word *world* has come to mean something rather sanctimonious and old-fashioned—something very dreadful, but why, or what it is, one does not quite know. Certainly Canaan was as much in the world as Egypt was. The same heaven shut them in, the same sun shone upon both. In Canaan as in Egypt people had to eat and drink, and eating and drinking meant forethought and work and arrangement. In Canaan as in Egypt they must make bricks and hew stones if they were to have houses to live in. Why then talk about some part of it as *"the world"*?

Well, the difference between Canaan and Egypt sets forth as in a picture exactly the difference between what the Bible calls the children of this world and the children of God. Egypt was the land *that knew not God*. "I know not the LORD" (Ex. v. 2) is the language of Pharaoh. The very physical conditions of the two lands exactly expressed the difference. The land of Egypt was a land where they *looked down* for everything; the land of Canaan was the land where they *looked up* for everything. The river Nile, which they worshipped as their god, was the very life and sustenance of the land. It was that upon which they depended for their wealth and their national prosperity. The Nile diverted meant Egypt becoming an uninhabitable desert. Their very bread came from the Nile. In the dream of Pharaoh, by which was foretold the years of plenty and the years of famine, it was *up out of the river* that there came the seven cows well-favoured, and it was *up out of the river* that there came the seven cows ill-favoured and lean-fleshed. The overflowing of the Nile meant prosperity the lack of this meant famine. So was Egypt the land where man looked down instead of up.

But Canaan was the land where the hills stretched away to heaven, and the soft clouds gathered about their summits and poured their wealth into the land. It was vividly pictured by the psalmist, in words that present the contrast very sharply.

"You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it. You water its ridges abundantly, You settle its furrows; You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth. You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths drip with abundance. They drop on the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. [R.V.]—The meadows are clothed with flocks and the valleys are covered with grain; they shout for joy, yes, they sing" (Psalm lxxv. 9-13).

The difference is not either fanciful or accident. It is pointed out by God Himself as the characteristic of the land to which they are going. "For the land, into which you are entering to possess it, is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you used to sow your seed and water it with your foot like a vegetable garden. But the land into which you are about to cross to possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning even to the end of the year" (Deut. 11:10).

So then Egypt is a picture of what the Bible means by "the world"; where they know not God: where they *looked down* for all instead of *looking up*. In order that they might serve God, His people must be brought from the one land to the other,—the land of course typifying and illustrating an inner spirit.

"*That you may know that I am the LORD,*" is the keynote to the book of Exodus. It is repeated no less than seventeen times in the book,—"*that you may know that I am the LORD.*" Israel is hemmed in by difficulties innumerable and beyond all human help: they are delivered by manifestations of an Almighty Power; they are led up into a great and terrible wilderness where neither bread nor water is, that they may learn to look up to God for everything.

Then again Egypt is a picture of the world,—*as it is without God so it is without hope*. As men look down for everything so they are shut in by the little patch of earth upon which their eyes fall. He who looks up sees a whole heaven; he who looks down sees little but his own shadow. That is the world, it is the tyranny of the seen blinding men to the unseen; it is the tyranny of the present shutting men back from the eternal.

In the life of Abraham, the father and founder of Israel, have you noticed this *look-up*? "Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked." "Look now toward heaven," said God. And the author of the epistle to the Hebrews seems to see the man of God with that far away upward look. He dwells in a tent, declaring himself a pilgrim and a sojourner; the abiding place is not here, but he looks away and upward to find it, away to a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. He looks afar off and sees the day of Christ and is glad. He walks the earth ennobled by that kinship to the world's Messiah. Thought, desire, hope, are loosed from the little today with its narrow bounds and are uplifted and set upon God,—his shield and his exceeding great reward. And now where are the children of Abraham? Here in Egypt, blind and deaf and dead to all their high calling; with that glorious picture all faded out of their thoughts. All through the fierce day they must grind in their bondage, and then they turn to their onions and leeks and garlic and cucumbers. Without God and without hope in the world, mere beasts of burden, getting through their dreary toil and then eager only for enough to eat.

And this is Egypt still, a land of bondage where God is not known, where to talk of God is to move a stare of wonder or a scornful laugh. "The Lord helps those who help themselves,—that is our gospel, sir. Push and tact are the Providence of these times. *What pays* is the only matter we have to see to. That decides what you ought to do and what you ought to leave undone. Talk about generosity, unselfishness, a desire to help other people as much as ourselves—No sir, it is a pretty sentiment: but it won't *pay*, it really won't."

"And what if it doesn't pay?" says an angel, innocently, "Is that everything?"

Then the world sighs pitifully. There is but one real heresy and that is the heresy for which Paul and Silas suffered so much; it interfered with the hope of men's gains. "Really, sir, you don't understand business," says the world scornfully. And if business is that which shuts out

God, and which takes a mean advantage of one's neighbour, I think the angel straightway sings a new song of praise that he does not.

"Let My people go that they may serve Me." Canaan is the place of God's service, the land where God's Presence dwells. Where the heart is set free for Him and His commandments; where the fear of the LORD is before the eyes; where the trust is in Him and where His blessing rests; where wife and family and household, where the very ox and the ass are shut in and blessed by His care and guarded by the majesty of His law. "The eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning even to the end of the year."

It is a land where love and goodness and truth are more than gold, are indeed the only true gold; where the people are bound by a great and glorious promise to the hope of a Prince and Saviour and are knit thereby into a true brotherhood. Life in Egypt is always a bondage and a toil: a thing from which we want to escape but can find no deliverance,—a weariness and a despair. But life in Canaan is a glad freedom, a blessed safety, a restful communion, an uplifting triumph.

Do not think of Canaan as the *reward* of service or the rest from service; it is the *place of service*. It is not a "type" of Heaven; a distant blessedness beyond this world. It is our place of service *here and now, in this world*. "When you come into the land to which I bring you" is the constant preface to the commandments and services which they are to observe. A man must get there *before* he can serve God. And he can get there only by the help and guidance of God. But if he give himself up to God, assuredly he shall reach that land, the land where God is a living Presence, a gracious and loving Father controlling the whole life, ordering all our affairs; a land where all the life is blessed with the safety of His care, encompassed with favour as with a shield, and glad with the steady glow of a blessed future. *"Let My people go that they may serve Me;"* let us hear His call and rise up to respond to it with all our hearts. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the children of God."

VI.

SERVICE

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let My people go, that they may serve Me.” —Exodus. 8:1.

LET us turn aside somewhat from the story of Moses to consider here the purpose of God in dealing thus with Israel. “This people have I formed for Myself, they shall show forth My praise,” saith He. They were to be entrusted with the revelation of His will and word. Through them God would make Himself known to the world.

And further their very history was to illustrate God’s method of dealing with His people. Here were to be unfolded the great principles and purposes of God in relation to the lives of all them that are His.

Who then are these whom God calls *My people*? Are not all people His, to hear Him and to obey? Must not all men render their account to Him?

My people! We can think that haughty Egypt heard it and laughed aloud—“What, these wretched creatures that dare not call their lives their own! These slaves the chosen favourites of Heaven! No, no. If the gods care for any it is for kings, and for mighty men of valour, for the learned and the great. The mighty Pharaoh with his pomp and his palaces, and this proud nation—we are they in whom the gods delight.”

My people! We can think the Israelite heard it and sighed—“Ah, if only I were one of them—alas, it is not for me to think of such a boast and blessedness.” We see the poor slave stand for a moment, lifting the lean and bruised body in the fierce heat of the sun; the fetter chafes his wrist; and now the taskmaster’s whip falls upon his shoulders with a curse, “You are idle—you are idle.” One of His people indeed! And sighing bitterly the Israelite turns to his burden. Blessed be God—He is not ashamed of His poor children. Ashamed! It is almost blasphemy to put it so far from the truth. No indeed, He stoops lowest for those that are lowest down. He comes most gloriously for those that are the neediest. Never in the whole history of the world did He reveal Himself with such pomp and majesty as for these poor slaves. Of these it is that the word is spoken—*Let My people go that they may serve Me.*

WHO ARE THESE WHOM GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE?

They are a distinct and separate race. The blood of Abraham flows in their veins. To their father it is spoken—“In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” and henceforth this people is to be distinct and peculiar, a people whom the LORD hath set apart for Himself. This and this only determines who are the people of God. *It is a matter of birth.* This one thing marks them off from all others—their ancestry. The people of God are not those who agree with each other as to certain theories—in these things they may be as far apart as the poles. It is not that they come together on certain particular occasions and observe the same ceremonies. No ceremonies, however ancient, however solemn, however significant, however faithfully observed, can make them His people. The distinction is one of birth. It is a difference of nature. Born of God, begotten of God, they are the children of God. Within them is the very Spirit of God whereby they cry *Abba, Father*. By ties of closest and most tender relationship they are bound to Him and He to them. He has bestowed on them such manner of love that they are called the children of God; and He is their Heavenly Father. All their life is sacredly dear to Him; and all their way is under His guidance and tender care. These are His people. Greatness, wisdom, honour, don’t make our claim upon Him; neither can poverty, nor wretchedness unmake that claim. It is in no wise dependent upon our circumstances, since it is only and wholly a matter of birth.

Nor is this all. His people are created of God *by a distinct and wholly supernatural act.* They are the children of a new life—the children of the resurrection. There was another son of Abraham, who for Abraham’s sake was dear to God; upon whom was the sign and seal of the

Covenant; but the descendants of Ishmael were not those whom God called "My people." It was only when Abraham and Sarah are "as good as dead" (we should have said "as bad as dead," but they are no good to God until they are dead) that Isaac is born, the child of laughter—the heir of the promise; through him it is that they are a peculiar people, unlike any other race or nation—separate, distinct, begotten of God. This is what makes us *His people*. No church relationship can suffice—no external observance. These may declare His people, but they can't *constitute* them such. Circumcision did not make them children of Abraham—it only declared them to be such. These and these only are His people—*they who are born of God; begotten through faith in Him who is the true Isaac, by the power of His resurrection*. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12, 13).

And out of that relationship to God come a thousand new relationships. There is a new *authority* which is ever supreme. There is a new *nature*, with new hopes, and new desires, and new needs, and new aspirations, and new delights;—a nature which can find its only satisfaction in Him in Whom it found its source. There is a new relationship to all things. Born of God, they look farther; they soar higher; they find more. The narrow present is merged into the everlasting; the opinions of others give place to the will of God: the claims and attractions of the world are checked and dulled by the glories of the Heavenly. His people hear and understand and respond to a voice that says—*Let My people go that they may serve Me*.

BUT IF THESE ARE HIS PEOPLE, WHY DOES HE ALLOW THEM TO BE HERE?

Come, see the people of God, His chosen ones, whom He has promised to make into a great nation. They are toiling slaves; oppressed and beaten, ground down by cruelty; their children are slain; themselves kept alive only as hopeless, helpless beasts of burden; subject to the heathen, reproached by the haughty scorn of the Egyptians as they continually say—*Where is your God now?* Forsaken, wronged,—has God forgotten to be gracious? Who shall rescue them out of the hand of Pharaoh?

That they shall know that I am the LORD—this is the key to it all. They are hemmed in by all possible evils in Egypt, so that they may see the greatness and might of their God in their deliverance. They are led into the wilderness where there is neither bread nor water, so that they may learn to look up to God for their help. If the choice were ours, what should we choose for the people of God? Recall the history of Israel in the land of Goshen—a people growing rapidly in numbers and in wealth,—and like all prosperous people, having the favour of those around them, and daily becoming more one with the Egyptians. They are at home in the land: contented with their circumstances, and forgetful of their origin, of their high calling, and their great destiny. What have they to do with Canaan, from where they had been driven by famine! What do you think—that this is the truest blessedness for the people of God? Is this what you would choose for them?

If they are ever to become the great nation that God purposed, they must be led out of Egypt, and they must know God. As the massive palace needs to have its foundations dug out of the earth—the very rock must be blasted, and the walls go down deep upon the solid ground, so God would find the foundations for this great nation. Do you not see how, as soon as they began to be afflicted, they began to be marked off from Egypt? The friends of their prosperity fell away from them like the leaves from the tree when winter frosts touch it and winter winds blow. Their wrongs they suffered drove them together: the fire that played upon them melted them into one, with a unity that they could only have known thus; and the strokes of the taskmaster welded and riveted them together.

And now in their anguish they begin to think of the God of their fathers. The stars of the promise shine in this gloom. Hopes and memories that were lightly forgotten, now once more are recalled and treasured. Had not the God of Abraham spoken great things concerning

them? Were they not to go up to the goodly land flowing with milk and honey? So their cry rose up to the God of Heaven and their God came down for their deliverance.

That they may know that I am the LORD—that is the key to all the mystery—if we did but know it, that is the key to all the life of His people. See how the accumulated wrongs and ills of Egypt wrought into Israel the need of God; and gave to God the opportunity for the manifestation of His glorious Power! The mightier the nation that oppressed them, the greater the glory of their deliverance. The more hopeless their condition, and the more hopeless the people, so much more room was there for God to show forth His mighty arm. So is it that Moses comes to the haughty Pharaoh—“Let My people go that they may serve me.” Then, as he refuses, the miracles follow one after another, humbling Egypt to utter helplessness, and making Israel more and more confident of deliverance, until at last, with the firstborn dead in every house, the terror-stricken people of Egypt rise up and tell them to go.

And then, amidst glories and wonders manifold, God led forth His people across the Red Sea, and brought them safely to the other side, while the proud Pharaoh and his host sank like lead in the mighty waters. And that day, as Israel stood upon the shore of the Red Sea—a sea of glass mingled with fire—and as Miriam took the timbrel and led the songs of His people, “Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!”—then all knew how glorious a thing it is to belong to the people of God.

Look at it all. Which do you think is better—a life of ease, of indolence, of self-indulgence,—or a life in which we learn to see the greatness and the glory and the goodness of God? *“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”* (John 17:3).

The greatness of life—its breadth and depth, its expanse like heaven above us,—its solidity like the earth beneath us,—is exactly according to our knowledge of our God. And the deep peace and rest—the blessedness and satisfaction—these too come only from knowing Him.

We are most indebted, not to those things for which it is easiest to give thanks, but to those from which we have shrunk, and which made us wonder, fear, perhaps even doubt. The reaper is a happy man, and poets sing and artists paint the scene of harvest home. But the keen frosts that break the clods, and the patient ploughman plodding wearily behind the plough—share with which he cleaves the soil in chill winter winds and under cheerless skies—these are apt to be forgotten and unthanked. And yet what should the reaper bring if the ploughman went not forth? *My people*. God sends them to school that they may learn to know Him.

Learn further *that wherever His people are led, they can never get to where God cannot help them*. Be sure of that. Whatever clouds gather, they cannot hide His child in the darkness. No circumstances can ever shut us out from His help.

Come and look into this lowly dwelling-place of the Hebrews. See here the mother bending over her little one, against whom has gone forth the cruel decree of death. Her eyes are blinded with tears, her heart bursts with grief—the child is pressed passionately to her lips. Has God forgotten His people? Is the enemy to triumph forever? Fear not. This little child shall lead Israel forth. This very Pharaoh who has decreed his death shall secure his life. The palace of the king shall be his home; the might of Egypt shall encompass him with safety, and the wealth of Egypt shall be at his service.

My people. The LORD knows them that are His. He leads them in a way that they know not, but He knows the way. Fear not: we too may sing: “He leads us in a right way to bring us to a city of habitation.” (Psalm 107:7—“*And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for a dwelling place*”).

Notice yet another characteristic of His people.

See Israel come forth from Egypt. Every man, every woman, every child bows his head beneath a doorpost on which is sprinkled the blood—each one passes between the side posts whereon is the crimson stain. They are the redeemed of the LORD—*My people*,—ransomed by a great price.

The people of God find their deliverance in the power of the Cross. Ponder carefully the words of St. John in connection with these marks of those whom God calls *My people*. “*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith*” (1 John 5:4).

It’s by the Cross of Christ that the world is crucified unto us, and we are crucified unto the world. There is no way out of the world but that by which Israel went—by the way of the redeeming Blood—underneath the Cross of Christ. The only power that can loose us from the tyranny of the world and keep us free—the only power that can constrain the constant and glad service of God, is the power of that new life which is ours by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our LORD.

So then, if we would hear this voice and be freed for service, our way is very plain—no one need err therein. *Let there be the daily surrender of ourselves to Him*. We are His—His people, to be led by Him, and to know Him in all the round of the daily life—to find Him and to please Him in all our work. Let that be the supreme aim and end of our being. Set the will over on His side. Gather the desires and purposes into His Presence. The fierceness of our self-will and the over-eagerness are withered and destroyed by submission to Him. He alone, who made us, can rightly adjust our subtle self towards all things, and He alone can keep the delicate balance of the heart. We need to be wound up daily, and to be set right daily. Gather about yourself the assurance of His tender care as the atmosphere in which you live and have your being; put the hand in His to be led of Him, and look forth upon the world as the place of your discipline and service, and the opportunity for knowing Him. Seek a clear spiritual perception. A right motive in all things is the secret of a quick ear and a clear vision. In Jesus Christ, our glorious Captain and Leader, expect and claim the power of a prompt and complete obedience. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14). Given up for guidance and keeping at His side, be assured that we shall find ourselves led within that goodly land that flows with milk and honey—the land where all is blest with His Presence and bright with His favour; where all is made glad by His service. The Power that wrought these wondrous works for Israel is ever available for our deliverance; therefore let us surrender ourselves wholly to Him. This is the will and purpose of our God, and the great promises of His love lead us up to this. “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our LORD Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:3, 4).

VII.

HALF-WAY HOUSES

"Let My people go, that they may serve Me." —EXODUS 8:1.

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." —MATTHEW 7:24.

WE have seen in these words a picture and parable of the world, the place in which the people were, and the place in which God would have them for service. We have seen His people, who and what they are. The next part of the story brings us to what the world says of these proposals. The subject is *Half-Way Houses*: compromises: halting places: where dwells Mr. Facing-both-ways and his kith and kin.

In reply to the challenge of the Most High, Pharaoh makes four proposals. The first is in the twenty-fifth verse of this chapter. *"And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, Go, sacrifice to your God in the land."*

The second proposal is in the twenty-eighth verse, "I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away."

The third proposal, in the tenth chapter and in the eighth verse: "And Moses and Aaron were brought to Pharaoh again, and he said to them, *Go, serve the LORD your God: but who are they that shall go?* And Moses said, We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD. Then he said to them, The LORD had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go! Beware, for evil is ahead of you. Not so! Go now, you *who are men*, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desired." And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence."

The fourth and last proposal is in the twenty-fourth verse. "Then Pharaoh called to Moses and said, 'Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you'."

It is a picture of the world and its proposals. Let us look at them.

Go, sacrifice to your God in the land.

It was an impudent proposal. Go, sacrifice to your God in the land. Whose land? Pharaoh's—their master: Go, as my slaves and worship your God. Pharaoh did not think of it as *service*! Of course it would have been impossible. They were *his* servants, they could go and sacrifice to their God—but their strength and toil was for him. They must make his bricks and build his cities and be at the beck and bidding of heathen taskmasters, but they could go and offer an occasional sacrifice to their God! Pharaoh's idea of religion is most common today. Religion is not seen as *the service* of God—not that which demands all the mind and heart and soul and strength—it is just a matter of opinion: a set of notions. "It does not matter much after all"—Pharaoh seems to say—"if you think your God is better than our gods, well go, and worship Him,—only make haste back to your work. It is not worth fighting about." That is exactly the world's estimate of it. Religion is just a matter of theory and form. Some prefer this place and some another; some think this form the only right one, and some run to another; some call themselves by one name, and some by another. It is natural, perhaps, that people should prefer to do as their fathers did before them in these matters. Go then, and sacrifice to your God in the land.

There is another form of this Pharaohism, as we may call it. If possible it is worse than that blank formalism because it is more utterly selfish. That's a religion which is not a great surrender of ourselves to God for His service and for obedience to Him, but is just a coming to Him for what we can get, not for what we can give. Many people must have a little religious service. Just as men quieten a noisy dog with a bone they try in this way to quieten an uneasy conscience. It balances the account and sets things right. Sin if you must; and then go to the service and pray. Grind, and cheat, and make your money, and then give a subscription to some good cause.

Be not deceived. God is not mocked. His demand is—*Let My people go that they may serve Me—serve Me*. It is the word used of Pharaoh. He made Israel *to serve with rigour*. It was indeed an impudent proposal. “We are called to *serve* God, Pharaoh. If we are your servants, what do you think you means? That we may come now and then and bow down before you and cry ‘Great is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and we are his people’; and then are we to go down to make bricks for another king and to build the city of one who defies you. No, no. We know what your service means. And our God says—*Let My people go that they may serve Me*.” That and that only is true religion—*serving God*. Not creeds; not theories; but a life in which every power and faculty is surrendered to Him for His service. God’s standard of service is not poorer or lower than the world’s, and the world scorns the man who is content with this sort of religion.

Look at the answer of Moses. “It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us?” It would be a twofold abomination—an abomination to God if they should offer Egyptian sacrifices, and an abomination to Egypt should they offer these to the God of Israel. In either case it would shock and offend the Egyptians—and they will stone us. The world has this amount of honesty in it: it does expect a man to be consistent. If a man goes so far as to kneel down and acknowledge God as the LORD, it does expect that he should get up and serve Him. The world has always got a stone ready for those who turn and dodge and try to make what they call the best of both worlds. The man who sighs piously and talks sweetly—and yet is the very slave of the world; toiling in its slime pits and brick kilns, fretting over its losses as much as anybody else, gloating over its gains like a very miser; able to whittle and shape the truth to fit his convenience; to shift and dodge for gain; to take advantage of his neighbour; and then he gives his subscription with a smirk of satisfaction; and goes and sings of the “realms of the blest,”—What? Do you think God is mocked by such deceivers? I tell you God cannot and will not endure them. “I will vomit them out of My mouth.” And the world shall scorn them and stone them with its ridicule. “He a religious man? He says he’s a Christian? He indeed! We do not know much about it, but we know too much to believe that!” Sir, neither God, nor man, nor devil, will ever be imposed upon by so palpable a sham. Do you think God is flattered and pleased by your occasional recognition of Him as the LORD? Why, it provokes Him, more than the heathen Egyptians provoked Him. To bow before Him as the LORD, and yet to live in defiance of His commandment! To kneel at His feet; and yet to go forth and serve His enemies! To hear of His love; and yet to live to ourselves! To hear of eternity and the dread realities of the judgment; and yet to live as if the present were all, and as if gold were the only good! You cannot limit the Almighty to days and places: you cannot blind Him to *other* days, and *other* ways, and *other* places. He knows the *heart*: He deals with the will: He demands the surrender of the whole man, the service of the whole life. This is His challenge. *Let My people go that they may serve Me*. Religion is His *service* or it is a mockery.

“*You shall not go very far away*,” said Pharaoh. Make a little visit to your God as you think duty may require, and then come back again. Don’t go to any extreme. Don’t go far away.

Look at the answer of Moses. *We will go three days’ journey*. That far we must go if we would begin the service of God. Short of that they were Pharaoh’s slaves, not God’s servants. Three days’ journey—the death, the grave, and the resurrection lie within the compass of those three days. The sea of destruction down into which they went as into the grave; up on the other side into the freedom and blessedness of the goodly land; then burst their first note of praise, and then rang out their rapturous triumph. That three days’ journey is ever the distance that must sever us from the world—the Cross, the grave, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the great separation.

Well, go you men, but leave your wives and little ones. Go indeed! God forbid! The God of the families of the whole earth claims the whole family—we will go every one of us.

Well, go then. But leave your cattle and sheep. No indeed, said Moses, we want them to sacrifice to the LORD our God. We will not leave a hoof behind.

Now what we have to learn is this, that there is only one service of God possible, and that is the thorough, whole-hearted, out and out service for Him which reaches to everything. Service that is not for God is service of that which sets itself up as His rival and enemy. Man must have one of two masters—either God or Mammon. That is the necessity of his very nature. Man is marked off from all other creatures not only by a consciousness of his need. He is the only creature on the face of the earth who has a future, and he lives in the future more than in the past. It is what is *going to be* that is most. He is the only creature capable of anxiety and care. So then, he is the servant of God or the servant of fear and worry. There can be no service of God except that which includes everything and claims the whole life. There is a notion that such out-and-out and whole-hearted service for God is a kind of privilege to which a few saintly souls may attain—a sort of first-class carriage to Heaven for fortunate people who can afford it—while most of us must go third-class. Away with so monstrous a notion. God as supreme, can acknowledge only one service—the best, the deepest, the truest of which we are capable.

He who would not accept a sacrifice that was torn or maimed or lame, will not accept half-hearted service, or that which is shared with His foes. His commandment requires nothing less than a complete surrender. You shall *love*—‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself’ (Luke 10:27). That commandment is the measure of our duty, and God has provided all grace for its perfect fulfilment. He, whose name is Love, is a jealous God, and cannot suffer a divided affection. Be assured of this—the only service which can both satisfy God and satisfy us is a whole-hearted, whole-souled service that extends to all that we are and all that we have, all that we can do, and all that we can be.

We witnessed a very singular sight off Cape Horn. For some miles there was a narrow strip of water, where the great waves flew in broken spray, and dashed high over the ship. On either side the sea was comparatively calm, while this strip boiled with fury, rolling and singing. Yet there was no rock about which the sea surged, nor was there any such fierce wind as to account for it. Overhead the air was thick with sea-fowl. Thousands of birds dived into this troubled water. The smaller fish were, I suppose, flung up by the toss, and thus fell a prey to the birds. I naturally asked what was the reason of this strange sight, and found it was the point at which the tide met the strong current of the sea, and here they raged together. Within, the tide only ran and it was calm. Without, the current prevailed and there too was calm. On this troubled bit they met and neither prevailed. It is the picture of those who are at once too religious to belong to the world—and too worldly to belong to religion: torn by both and satisfied by neither.

THE PLAGUES

WE come now to the account of the plagues by which the stubborn defiance of Pharaoh is subdued, and the people of Israel are released from bondage.

If to us, accustomed to an unchanging order of things, it is difficult to conceive of any such miraculous interference with nature, let us honestly ask ourselves *in what other way could the deliverance of Israel have been accomplished?* Here is a nation of slaves who have rendered great service to a proud people, and who are utterly subject to the sway of a mighty despot, and spirit-broken and hopeless as they are, they themselves resent the attempts that are made for their freedom. These people, full of fear and quite unable to help themselves, are yet led triumphantly out of their slavery, and brought into possession of a land where they rise to a position of great power, and exercise an influence such as no other people ever exercised before, or scarcely since. If all this be wrought naturally it is a greater miracle than anything involved in the story of the plagues of Egypt. Remember, that they had no powerful ally in any other nation, and were quite unable to strike a blow for themselves. Remember, too, with what difficulty the freedom of any nation of slaves has been accomplished in these times, when the will and efforts of the best citizens have set themselves to secure it. Recall the cost to England of freeing the slaves of the West Indies,—and yet more the cost to America of freeing the Southern States from slavery. How, then, are these slaves to be delivered? No other account can explain the great fact in the history of Israel, than this—that God Himself by a series of signs and wonders terrified Egypt so that they were glad to be rid of a people whose presence threatened their very existence.

Nor can we forget what these events were to accomplish in the education of Israel and in the education of the world. It was the challenge of God to Egypt through His servant Moses, as long afterwards the challenge of God came to Israel through His servant Elijah. It was the challenge of God to the greatest system of idolatry in the world, the very source and fountain of all the later idolatries. The Almighty passes sentence upon their false gods and seeks to execute it in judgment upon the nation that served them. For Egypt's sake and for the sake of the other nations of the earth, and above all for Israel's sake, this lesson is to be taught—graven for ever upon their memory: buried deep into the national consciousness. It must be written in large letters, that the world may heed it. The great purpose of these plagues and of God's dealing with Egypt is expressed in these words—*You shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.* Their deliverance must be altogether and unmistakably of the LORD. And the work must be one of judgment. *Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.*

Each of the plagues has a distinct significance that could not fail to be recognised both by Israel and Egypt.* In relation to Israel it must be remembered that they had grown accustomed to the idolatries of the land, and could not fail to be contaminated by the superstitions and iniquities of the Egyptians. They must be taught imperishably the fear of the LORD which is the beginning of wisdom. *I am the LORD* must be spoken again and again with increasing loudness until all the nations of the earth do acknowledge Him.

*For this see Hillington's *SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE LAND OF HAM*.

And amidst the terrors of these visitations do not let us overlook the mercy that mingles with the judgment: and that proclaims a God who is slow to anger. The signs before the plagues, the warnings which preceded the punishment, show us how that the Most High always threatens before He strikes, and never strikes if holding up His hand is enough. Note too, the speedy cessation of the plagues when the king yields; then the interval, and the further conference between the several visitations.

The first great plague may be taken as having in itself the principles and purposes of which we have spoken. It came directly out of the river. What the Nile was to Egypt appears from the fact that it is always spoken of as "*the river*," "*the river of the Egyptians*." It was the

great divinity of the nation, and was worshipped with the most profound reverence as the god of their gods. It was the source of all life. To an idolatrous people it might certainly come to be regarded as divine much more readily than many of the objects that were worshipped. There was the mystery of its origin, the secret of all the ages, affording room for all kinds of weird imagining. There was its immense length—the longest river in the world, baffling the curiosity of the nations it so enriched, stretching away into the infinite. Then there was the abundance and the sweetness of its waters. To this very day the water of the Nile is held as peculiarly sweet and refreshing, especially as the water of the wells is mostly brackish. Then there was the beneficence of the river, its peculiar enriching of Egypt—coming with noiseless benediction to the soil, renewing the fields and making the ground so fertile that corn and grass and a thousand fruits and vegetables grew with a wonderful luxuriance. About the middle of August the river, after a gradual rise of many weeks, poured forth through the channels and openings prepared for it, and covered the lowlands with broad sheets of water depositing upon them the rich alluvial soil brought down in its course from upper Egypt. There was no need of agricultural instruments or processes. As soon as the river had spread itself over the lands and returned to its bed, each man scattered the seed over the ground, and waited patiently for the harvest.

And its beneficence was completed by its beauty. It flowed on between the rich plain which it had saved, by its waters, from becoming a desert waste like that beyond its touch. On its banks as far as eye could reach stretched the golden corn. Here and there were clusters of palm and groves of sycamore. The level of the plain was broken by hillocks and crowned by villages and temples. Beside the river grew the reeds and flags, and the lotus spread its richly scented flowers on the surface. The river teemed with fish. While the fish of the sea were held to be unclean, the fish of the river were highly esteemed, and amazingly abundant.

And then, too, on the waters of the Nile went the commerce of the nations. Little wonder that all this should have made it the object of religious worship to such a people. In the earlier ages the Egyptians had been accustomed to sacrifice human victims to the Nile at the time of its annual rising, and although this had been discontinued it may have been with some such superstitious thought that the command had been given to cast any male child of the Hebrews into the river.

The great source and giver of life—out of it came the greater divinities, in it dwelt the lesser divinities: the very reptiles which it nourished, the reeds and the flowers which grew on its banks were sacred.

This river, held in such veneration, is to become the source of Egypt's first great plague.

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand by the river's bank to meet him."

The scene reminds us of Elijah waiting for Ahab at the gate of Naboth, so sudden, so startling is the appearance and so terrible.

It is an Egyptian morning. The glory of the dawn fills all the sky as the proud Pharaoh goes forth from the palace, amidst his guards and attendants, to the holy river.

Very likely, as many suppose, the occasion was one of some great annual festival in honour of their god.* The priests gather about him, their robes resplendent, and the uplifted ark catches the light of the early sun. They stand ready to pour forth the libations and to offer the incense. The host of people bow in lowliest homage as the priests sing the hymn of worship—"Hail to thee, O Nile, that showest thyself in this land, coming in peace, giving life to Egypt. O hidden one, thou leadest the night onward to the day, a leading that rejoices the heart! Thou overflowest the gardens created by Ra: thou givest life to the animals, thou waterest the land without ceasing, from the path of heaven descending, lover of good, bestower of corn, giving life to every homestead!" The song has ceased: when abruptly the servants of God come before Pharaoh,—Moses, with the rod in his hands, Aaron by his side. Moses is now the prince of God. He rises to all the solemnity of the occasion. Fearless, outspoken, without preface or apology, his voice rings upon the still air with its terrible prediction—"The LORD God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, *"Let My people go, that they may*

serve Me in the wilderness”; but indeed, until now you would not hear! Thus says the LORD: “By this you shall know that I am the LORD. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to.”—Ex. 7:16, 17.

*See especially Canon Rawlinson’s *MOSES: HIS LIFE AND TIMES*, p. 94.

Their very daring was probably their safety. They, unarmed and unattended, venturing thus into the presence of Pharaoh, intruding upon this sacred hour, desecrating the worship of the great Egyptian deity, speaking words of such threatening to one accustomed only to the lowliest homage—these men seemed to have the Invisible beside them. If God be not with them how should they have done this thing! And so the host stood and wondered. Aaron took the rod from the hand of Moses and stretched it over the river. And lo, the Nile, the sacred Nile, in the midst of their adoration was turned to blood—it grew into a sluggish current, red, loathsome, revolting. And as they turned, the sight and smell of the thing followed them. Every little canal, every pond, every tank, the water which stood in their houses, in vessels of wood and vessels of stone—all stank. The fish died. The putrefaction filled the air. And only by digging down into the earth could the people find anything to drink.

To the superstitious Egyptians, skilled in reading portents and omens, this curse would have a yet further and deeper meaning. It would bring back the recollection of their cruelty to the Hebrews. Was it not in this very Nile that this Moses had been laid because of the law of Pharaoh. It was the manifestation of God’s power: and it was the revenge of the God of Israel. It was the terrible indication of One with whom they must settle, if Pharaoh should yet defy His word. (Compare Rev. 16:4, where we seem to read the comment on this first great plague.)

To the people it was a terrible calamity. It not only smote at their god, but at all the gods within it. It not only destroyed all the drinking water, and that in an atmosphere so hot and dry as Egypt, but they lost their most common and favourite food—*all the fish died*. They could not find water for any purpose,—they, the cleanliest of all ancient nations, whose very religion demanded the most scrupulous washings of the person—and for seven days they could neither wash themselves, nor their clothes, nor any of their utensils.

But the plague, great and terrible as it must have been to the people, does not seem to have alarmed Pharaoh. For him there were plenty of slaves to labour, and as long as water could be had he was satisfied, and in sullen defiance of God he went his way. Rich wine for him supplied the place of water. Rare perfumes thrust away the evil smells that others had to endure. It may have been, to this stubborn and hardened king, that there was a grim and dreadful satisfaction in his haughty defiance of Moses. “Let your God do His worst, I will not yield to Him. I am Pharaoh.”

THE LAST PLAGUE

“Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence.” —EXODUS 11:1.

WE come now to the hour of Israel’s deliverance. The last plague and final blow. All else led up to this. The death of the firstborn was the great climax gradually reached and in growing severity. From the first, this was set forth as the penalty of Pharaoh’s refusal to let Israel go. Before Moses had set forth to Egypt this was given him as the message from God. *“Then you shall say to Pharaoh, Thus says the LORD: Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.”* Nine plagues had already come upon the land: but until now the power of God had been shown by punishing rather than destroying. These plagues became more and more severe until the cattle and the persons of the Egyptians began to be stricken; and, in the plague of the hail, those that refused to heed the voice of Moses and to seek shelter were slain. Then came the plague of darkness. Nothing produced so deep an impression upon the king and people as did this, and certainly none was so terrible.

That awful darkness rested upon the land for three days— it was as a weight upon men, a thing that could be felt. The terror was completed by the utter helplessness and sense of isolation, everyone cut off and alone in the land. *“They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days.”* What dreadful silence fell upon temple and palace, upon street and rive; Egypt was buried as in a tomb. There was the further terror of what should come of it, and how long it should last; and the quickening of men’s conscience in that silence, memory bringing back the record of their cruelty to the people of God, and the proofs of His power. It was a time of meditation for Egypt, an opportunity to hear and heed the voice of the Most High before He should smite with the last great plague. And to the haughty Pharaoh and his princes it was a humiliating proof of his powerlessness. What could he do with all his horsemen and his men of war, sitting there in silence with none that could minister to him—what could he do to hinder the escape of Israel? With the clear light of heaven shining upon their hosts how easily they could have got up and gone forth with wives and little ones—for there was no one to stop them!

The effect of this plague upon Egypt was very marked. As soon as it had passed away Pharaoh called for Moses and said: “Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back.”

We must remember that the sheep and cattle of Egypt had suffered very greatly: they had been destroyed by the plagues of murrain and hail, and the sustenance had been cut off even from those that had escaped, so that the flocks and herds of Goshen were now of very great value. But Moses will not hear of the proposal. Pharaoh has now to do with a very different man from him who had first ventured into the palace on this errand. Emboldened and made fearless by the manifested Presence of God, now it is Moses who makes terms. Egypt and Israel have changed places, and it is Egypt that must beg for deliverance. The swift and sudden change that has come upon the nation appears in the eleventh chapter. “Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold.”

As in many lands today where banks are unknown and property is not safe, so was it the custom for the Egyptians to keep their wealth in the shape of portable ornaments of gold,—earrings and bracelets and anklets, and rings on every finger and on the thumb were the common possession of men and of women.

“And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians.” No doubt very many of them who lived near to Goshen would be glad to share the safety in which Israel dwelt, and would be glad to have such friends in time of such troubles as had come upon Egypt. But most

marked was the change that had come upon the land in reference to Moses. “Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants, and in the sight of the people.” As he passed along the streets these idolatrous people may well have been ready to fall down before him and do him homage—this man whose word was mightier than the magicians, who seemed to hold in his hand and at his bidding all the forces of evil before whom Pharaoh himself trembled, and against whom their very gods were powerless.

So then, let us set the scene before us. The king and his court, hushed and awed by the mystery of the darkness, send for Moses. He stands before them more majestic than ever, conscious of being the messenger of the God of Israel. “Go, serve the LORD; Let your little ones also go with you; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back.”

But Moses stands and looks upon the king. This is not the man and this is not the time to hear of compromise. “Our livestock also shall go with us,” he said; “not a hoof shall be left behind.” Then Pharaoh starts up enraged. Is he to be bearded and insulted by this Hebrew? here in his palace, among his courtiers, and with his armed men about him?!

His eyes flash with fire: his face is white with passion, and turning upon Moses he cries: *“Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!”*

Now it’s Moses who is king, not Pharaoh. With a dignified consciousness of power he stands and answers: “You have spoken well. I will never see your face again.” And he turned as if to leave. While he was yet in the palace it would seem there came to him the message of God. Pharaoh had never looked upon a face such as Moses turns to him now. With a voice fierce and threatening, Moses cried in a great anger—“*A heat of anger*” as it is in the margin. It is the fire that takes long to kindle that glows with a white heat, fierce and consuming. This meek man in a fury is a sight before which the king and his courtiers might well quail. The eyes flash indignantly, the man draws himself up to his full height, the speech loses its slowness and burns its way. “Thus says THE LORD: ‘About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who is behind the hand-mill, and all the firstborn of the animals. Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was not like it *before*, nor shall be like it again. But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that the LORD does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.’ And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get out, and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will go out.” Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger.”

This is the Moses of whom Stephen tells,—the man mighty in words and deeds. (Acts 7:22)

Thus these days which have been such a plague to Egypt have been a token to Israel. They have been the opportunity for getting the people of Israel together, and arranging for the feast of the Passover— they are a very different people from the dispirited and hopeless slaves they had been but a few weeks ago.

Each plague had been to them the manifestation of the might of their Helper: of the right hand that smote for their deliverance. (Exodus 15:6, 12). With a confidence in Moses that made them ready to heed his lightest word they gathered together, and made arrangements for the great observance with which they were to celebrate their deliverance.

Those three days of darkness upon Egypt doubtless would end their slavery. Now the taskmasters are more in dread of the slaves than the slaves of the taskmasters, and are eager to make their peace with a people whose God is so mighty, and for whom such wonders are wrought. Soon the people of Israel are busy preparing the Passover.

Thus Egypt and Israel alike waited for the striking of the dread hour.

THE INSTITUTION of the PASSOVER

EXODUS 12.

BETWEEN the last interview of Moses with Pharaoh and the death of the firstborn, the Israelites are directed to make ready for the Passover. At once they would eagerly commence to carry out that great observance which was really to mark their deliverance. It was the inauguration of the service for the God of the Hebrews.

At the outset, it is well for us to ask ourselves for a moment where this observance, perpetuated to this day amongst the Jews and throughout the whole Christian Church, could have come from unless from the great national deliverance of Israel; from this wonderful triumph over Pharaoh, and their passage across the Red Sea? It is clear at a glance that it is impossible to originate and to sustain a national celebration like this unless there was something to celebrate. The thing celebrated was not a matter that rested upon the testimony of two or three, or of a favoured company. The whole nation took part in the passage across the Red Sea. It was not a question for trained experts, but a thing that the little children could see and remember. How could you get a nation to celebrate its own deliverance unless it has taken place? And the very name and all the incidents of the ordinance point immediately to a series of events which could have no meaning except as the record of the direct intervention of GOD, and the miraculous deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. That cannot be an invention in which the people themselves are to celebrate that which they themselves have done, and which they are carefully to explain to their enquiring children—"And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' ²⁷ that you shall say, 'IT IS THE PASSOVER SACRIFICE OF THE LORD, WHO PASSED OVER THE HOUSES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT WHEN HE STRUCK THE EGYPTIANS AND DELIVERED OUR HOUSEHOLDS'."

But the Passover which thus points backwards point also as clearly forward, and is a wonderful "type" of the great salvation which is ours in Christ Jesus. The whole Epistle to the Romans is wrapped up in it.

The first great truth upon the very face of it is that *all have sinned*. There is no difference between Egypt and Israel in that respect. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; and upon Israel and Egypt sin has brought condemnation and the sentence of death. It was nothing that Israel could say, "We have Abraham to our father." It was useless for them to boast of what God had done for them in the miracles that had been wrought. Where the blood was not sprinkled there alike the Angel of Death smote, whether they within the house were Israelites or Egyptians. No privilege, no position, no knowledge can be *our* safety any more than it could be theirs. From end to end of the Bible there runs this one truth—WITHOUT SHEDDING OF BLOOD IS NO REMISSION,—from that early scene when Abel brings the lamb as it had been slain, and received the testimony that God was well-pleased with him, right on until we stand with the Seer and ask, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" and hear the answer, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Let us be sure that no privilege, no position, no knowledge, can be *our* safety any more than it could be theirs. Nothing can cancel the penalty of our sin but the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Notice secondly that *the way of deliverance was of Gods' direction*. They were to take a lamb without spot or blemish, and to bring it home on the tenth day; on the fourteenth day it was to be slain, and the blood caught in the basin was to be sprinkled on the lintel and door-posts. Israel had seen many tokens of God's power—lightnings and darkness and disease and hail—and in all a distinction had been made between Israel and Egypt. The Israelite might

have comforted himself with the assurance of that distinction. But, as we have seen, wherever the blood was not sprinkled the firstborn lay dead. It may be that we cannot perceive what the death of the Son of God has done for us; it may be that we can't understand why such a deliverance should be required. But let us remember that our sense of sin is very dim and imperfect. Our thought of God's holiness is poor and broken indeed. There are far-reaching purposes concerning us, going beyond all that we can know at present. Above all, let us remember that it's with the righteous God that we have to settle this matter of deepest and eternal import. And, if it please God to reveal to us His way of salvation, by which His righteousness is declared and yet His love has triumphed, shouldn't we eagerly accept it, adoring Him that He has devised a way in which He can be just and the justifier of those who believe?

Notice, further, the prominent features in the sacrifice of the Passover.

It was in the house. There was no Church that ever had such holy places for its celebration as the Jewish Church. Theirs was the tabernacle where the manifested Presence of the Most High dwelt; and theirs was a temple more glorious than any house of worship earth had ever seen; a place "*beautiful for situation*" the "*joy of the whole earth.*" Yet this, the most solemn festival of the Jewish Church, the very central observance of its ritual was AT HOME. We turn from the tabernacle of blue and purple and gold, enriched by its cunning needlework, and made awful by its solemnities; we leave the temple with its holy of holies, its sacred courts, its gilded roof and fretted pinnacles, and turn aside to the poor hut of the slave. A mud-hut cottage and rudely thatched, the whole place showing the poverty and wretchedness of the bondman and his family—the door-posts bent, perhaps broken:—and yet here it is that the lamb is slain; here it is that the blood is sprinkled. That's how it was in the beginning of the Christian Church, when the disciples "*broke bread*" from house to house.

Again, the Jewish Church exalted the power of the priest as no other Church could. By birth and by a hundred distinctions of Divine appointment, he was marked off for his high calling. Never had any other priest such authority; his it was to bear the sins of the people before God, and his to bring forth the benediction of the Most High. *But in this most solemn ordinance of the Passover the priest took no part.* From beginning to end the priest was neither seen nor heard. We turn from him in his robes of beauty and glory, with the breast-plate of gold hung with the golden chain and ribbons of blue; and before us comes the poor Israelite, everything about him proclaiming his coarse work and the cruelty of the taskmaster. *He* is to kill the lamb; *he* is to take the blood and to sprinkle it upon the door-posts. It is to be wholly and only a personal matter between the man himself and his God. It cannot be transferred to another, or bestowed by another. Our own faith must claim this great salvation; our own heart must receive this free gift. *No man can give another the sacrament.* He who gives it is not the one who makes it the sacrament, but he who takes it. Not that hand that holds it forth, but his who receives it must consecrate and transform the bread and wine into the emblem of the crucified Redeemer. Surely it is very remarkable that, in relation to an ordinance in which the priest has come to claim an awful authority, in that church where all was most minutely ordered of the LORD, *the priest had no part*; that the Passover, on which the Saviour founded the holy sacrament which was to perpetuate His memory, was established and observed when as yet there was no priest in existence.

Then, again, it was a most homely celebration. The Jewish religion was one of splendid ritual, celebrated amidst golden vessels,—the seven branched candlestick, the altars, the golden censers, and behind all the tapestried curtain, stretching up to the space above where the golden vine trailed its branches, and hung in clusters of grapes. All the more remarkable then was it that this ordinance is to be observed in a lowly hut and celebrated by a slave. No gold or silver is there here. Everything is of the poorest and homeliest.

And in recalling how that in the upper chamber of a peasant's house the Blessed Master ordained the ordinances of the Last Supper, let us remember how little He cared for either great display or the awe of mysterious processes. Was He not, and *is* He not the meek and lowly One, who came eating and drinking, going into the homes of the people and sitting

down in their midst; here too in all points like unto them? His disciples were fishermen; and His readiest and most eager listeners were the common people. Think, then, how great a grief it must be to Him when we make His supper a mystery so dreadful that many come to His table with fear, and timid souls are afraid to come at all.

Lastly, notice that this was *the only way of Israel's deliverance*. The Angel of Death went forth and sped swiftly through the land. But he was powerless to strike there where the blood was on the door-posts. Through that night Israel dwelt in safety beneath the sprinkled blood; and at the dawning of the day they marched forth from underneath the blood-stained lintel, no more the slaves of Pharaoh, but God's free men. The redeemed of the LORD have obtained joy and gladness, and go forth with singing to the goodly Zion to where their God should lead them. So let us be well assured that nothing can break the power of sin, nothing can deliver from its death sentence, but the precious blood of Jesus Christ our crucified Redeemer.

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ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE

"And it came to pass the self-same day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts." —EXODUS 12:51.

NEVER probably in the history of the world was there a scene more tragic and more wonderful than this of Israel's deliverance. What a night it was, when in every little hut and hovel of the Hebrews each family waited expectantly for the coming of the God of Israel—their souls stirred by the strange ceremony in which they had taken part—the blood sprinkled on the door-posts, and themselves standing ready for a journey, waiting for the moment of their freedom.

A nation is to be born in a day. Night has settled upon Egypt, upon its palaces, upon the stately houses of its nobles, upon the lowly homes of its toilers in all the land. Now comes the dread moment when the Angel of the LORD goes forth on his errand, whose shadow is the shadow of death. His flight is swift, and as he passes, lo! the firstborn is dead in every house. Then bursts upon the still night from every side a cry, the like of which had never been heard—*"The firstborn is dead! dead!"* And the whole nation sprang forth, as if delay meant further death, and thrust upon the Israelites their jewels of silver and their jewels of gold, and urged them to be gone. And Israel marched forth, a people for whom their God had wrought such great wonders—they and their little ones, their flocks and their herds—a great host numbering probably more than two millions of people. It was not a disorderly mob, but like the host of God, they were marshalled and "harnessed," or as it is rendered in the margin by *five in a rank*, step by step, each tribe under the leadership of the head man. And over them rose the wondrous tokens of God's Presence—the pillar of cloud casting upon them its kindly shade, and by night it shone a pillar of fire to give them light.

Very gracious are the words that come in amidst the great and terrible things which have been wrought for Israel. *"Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, 'Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt. So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea.'*

I have read in Swiss guide-books repeatedly the caution, *Beware of short cuts*, and have found not infrequently that short cuts often go a long way round. The nearest way is not always the best or the quickest, and the roundabout is often shortest. How tender was this considerateness for the people! If this had been an invention of man we would not have read the record of such a gracious compassion midst such a splendid triumph; but it is the very mark and token of our God, who tells the number of the stars and who heals the broken in heart. He ever leads us in a right way, and that way is not hard or exhausting. By-and-by Israel shall go forth against the Philistines and win great victories; but not yet. Soul, if you will let God lead you, He will lead you tenderly as well as wisely, and He shall deal with you according to your needs. *"He knows our frame: He remembers that we are dust."* He does not scorn our weakness, but is ever mindful of it. He will not laugh at our fears, but quiet them. This is surely the greatest, the sweetest, the richest token of God's love,—that He can be gracious to our fears.

Nor can we afford to overlook one other record of this host as they left Egypt: *they took with them the bones of their father Joseph*. That mummied figure in the very forefront of the host must have been very strange: a faith of three hundred years ago living amongst them still and finding its fulfilment now. "For Joseph had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you." It was the constant declaration and reminder of where they were going, the link between that past with all its promises and that future with all its purposes: a faith that was grandly

contagious, as faith always is,—day and night that awesome Presence going with them to their resting-place. So was it indeed that *“he being dead still speaks”* (Hebrews 11:4).

Now there comes to Moses probably the greatest trial of his faith that could possibly occur. We must think of him as the great warrior, once the victorious head of all the Egyptian army. We must think of him, too, as the born leader of men, with a swift and unerring perception of advantage and peril. God directs him to turn to the southward—towards the Red Sea, a place of which the Egyptians would at once say that they were entangled. On one side was the wilderness; on another side the steep rocky heights of a mountain range; and in front of them the Red Sea.

Meanwhile Pharaoh and the Egyptians have recovered from their fright. The pestilence that they had dreaded had ceased; and probably the magicians and priests, eager to recover the position which they had lost, take to themselves the credit of having delivered the nation, and now proclaim Israel’s speedy overthrow. Moreover, they had begun to find out how great was their loss,—a vast army of workmen had suddenly been taken from them, besides the treasures which in their fright they had thrust upon the people. It was not only Pharaoh who was resolved upon recapturing them, but the hearts of his servants were turned against Israel and they cried: “Why have we done this? Why have we let them go from serving us?” At once Pharaoh, in his pride and fury, smarting under the insults and penalties that he had suffered, gathered his host together. “I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil: my desire shall be satisfied on them.” So rang his proud boast. And leading forth six hundred of his chariots and the hosts of armed warriors he hastened after them. While Pharaoh is on his way let us set before us the position of Israel.

Here are these hundreds of thousands of men and women and children, a host untrained and undisciplined with flocks and herds; without a sword or spear among them for their defence; a people brought suddenly from slavery and scarcely capable yet if valuing worthily the great gift of their deliverance; haunted, too, with a cringing dread of their Egyptian masters, and peculiarly liable to be stricken with panic. And now it is that they pass down the narrow gorge between the rocky heights that hem them in. As the shades of evening gather there bursts a storm, roaring and raging as if it would sweep them into the sea. Before them breaks the thunder of the angry waves. It seems as if they were trapped for the foe. Then comes the dreaded evil that completes their misery and the cry rings from the host, “The Egyptians are coming after us!” Up against the lurid sunset on the ridge of the hills appear the chariots of Pharaoh. In the anguish of their despair the people turn on Moses. “Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.” Every moment the host of warriors increases, until all the hills seems covered with the chariots and the troops of armed men. Amidst such an agony of fear the sun goes down, and utter darkness sweeps over the host.

Now out upon the blast of the storm rings the voice of Moses calm and untroubled, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.”

Then the pillar of the cloud moved from the head of the host to the rear and hid the movement of Israel. To those it was darkness, thick darkness, such as may well have caused Pharaoh to be frightened, but to the Israelis it was light. The glory of the LORD is risen upon them: a light of unearthly beauty, softened as if the LORD looked forth in tender pity upon His people, lifting upon them the light of His countenance. And now the winds beat back the waters; and the voice of the great leader bids them *“Go forward.”* Forth marches the host, down into the path of the mighty deep, bedecked with treasure of shell and coral, with clustering sea weed and golden sand. So onward, through that wondrous night until the last of the host has started. Then the pillar of cloud is lifted from protecting the host as its rear-guard; and Egypt looks down from the heights to see that their captives have fled, that they have availed themselves of the effect of wind and tide and have gone across the sea. Not a moment is to be lost. Mad at having so easily overtaken their prey, so assuredly counted upon

them and yet to have lost them after all, they sweep down from their heights, almost uncontrollable in their wrath. “And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.” But the ponderous chariot-wheels sunk deep in the sand and dragged heavily. Moreover “the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians.” The wild storm beat furiously, bewildering the horses, blinding the leaders, terrifying the followers. The roar and roll of thunder shook the very ground, and out of the darkness came the forked flashes of the lightning,—God’s dagger, plunging through the gloom.

Meanwhile the day was breaking. And now Israel stood ranged upon the shore and along the cliffs, and they looked down upon the Egyptians. Then it was as if the mighty hands that kept back the floods were loosened. The gathering waters swept and surged until they leapt in their giant strength. In vain the Egyptians sought to return. Their cry of terror rang out sharp and terrible as the great seas met and dashed in glorious thunder,—and the armed Egyptians, horse and chariots, all the host of them, rolled in the depths of that dreadful tide.

At once as if its work was done the wild storm died away. The morning dawned all fresh and still. The waves, as if spent by their fury, are touched and kindled with ruddy splendour by the rising sun,—a sea of glass mingled with fire. With their enemies perished, with the land of bondage forever behind them, with the goodly country stretching before them, with God their own God dwelling in their midst, Israel sang exultantly the song of Moses, —the world’s oldest poem, and to this day one of its very noblest and most sublime. “I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The LORD is a man of war; The LORD OF HOSTS is His name. . . . Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces. The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’ You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.”

And for us what teaching and help is there here? All this ancient history becomes prophecy for us,—it’s the very picture of the triumph that shall be ours. “*And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb*” (Revelation 15:3). So this is all a “type” and picture of the redeemed. Heaven’s highest songs do grow out of this poor life of ours, like the water-lily rooted in the muddy depths, swayed by the currents here and there,—yet ever pushing up into the light, until at last it lifts its head above the flood and unfolds itself to heaven and floats in all its loveliness,—the fair up-growth from the mire; the pure result of chill floods and dreary days. “They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” They celebrate the Power that delivered them, the Grace that redeemed them, the Providence that led them.

MARAH AND ELIM

"I am the LORD that healeth thee." —EXODUS 15:26.

THIS chapter is a parable on healing—a very beautiful and living story for Hospital Sunday. Have you noticed the sharp and sudden contrast as we pass from the triumph of Israel to the record of Marah? Listen to the opening of the chapter—"Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! . . . The LORD is a man of war; The LORD is His name. . . . Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!" The air rings with music. The most wonderful triumph that earth had ever seen is celebrated in the most sublime song that earth had ever heard.

Then sounds the command that they go forward, and with light hearts and glad steps as if that music of their deliverance still rang in their souls, they start. *"And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. And the people complained against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?"*

So Israel, though so gloriously delivered, meets with troubles. Marching through a wilderness was bad enough, a stretch of dreary waste, great and terrible, its fierce heat withering them. But a wilderness without water! Think of this host of men and women and children with their flocks and herds, and there is no water. The cry of a people without bread is an awful thing, but thirst is more cruel and maddening than hunger. It is no great wonder that the men came with eyes flashing in rage against Moses and cried *What shall we drink?*

We must remember, too, how vividly there would rise before them the memory of the sweet and abundant waters of the Nile. How unfailing was its supply; how delicious its draught; how easy it was to get. They seemed in their dreams to hear the ripple of its flow along the banks, and they seemed to stoop and drink of its abundance—then woke to the fever and agony of thirst.

And not only the past was rose up to mock them by its contrast, but all that they had hoped in the future. Had not God sent Moses into their midst promising that He would bring them up into *a goodly land flowing with milk and honey?* Milk and honey, indeed! And they were perishing with thirst. They had been told of luxuries, and they lacked the commonest necessity of life.

And they were in the right way—the way in which they were led—not indeed the way they would have chosen, not the direct way from Egypt to Canaan, but a way round about. If it had been a judgment they might have understood it; but for this to meet them in the path of obedience; to have been led by such great and glorious tokens of God's favour, and by such wonderful manifestations of God's power—and yet to have no water! This is strange indeed.

And then came that which completed their misery. Now to these distressed hosts there gleamed afar off the signs of a fountain. The green grass grew luxuriant amidst the desert waste, the trees rose up luxuriant, with delicious shade. With eager eyes the foremost looked, and proclaimed the tidings, *Water, water!* The glad news spread on every hand, *Water, water!* The farthest heard it, and the last hastened eagerly. But as the host gathers there goes up a wail of disappointment—they cannot drink of it. The joy is turned to lamentation and anger, and they cry in despair, *Marah, Marah! Bitter, bitter!*

What is the meaning of this sharp lesson at the very outset of their pilgrimage? Let us look into it, for to see it is to see the principle that abides and that underlies God's dealings with us. The wilderness is God's school—not the home, but the school where His children have to learn that which shall fit them *for* home. It is not true love that prompts the mother to keep the

little son at home because he may get amongst rough lads, and because lessons are hard and many. That is a foolish fondness that will be the boy's undoing. God loves us too well and too wisely not to send us to school. And the first lesson that Israel had to learn was to *look up*—the lesson of their dependence upon God and of their fulness in Him. The great difference between Egypt and Canaan was this: that in Egypt they looked *down* for everything, and in Canaan they looked *up* for everything. And the wilderness was the school where they were to learn to look up. The difference is the great, deep, root difference. "The land which you go to possess," said Moses, "is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden"; the Nile by its overflow gave to the land its fertility, and by the water-wheel or by the bucket they carried the water. "But the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which *drinks water from the rain of heaven.*"

That is the first lesson, LOOK UP: learn to see God: to trust God. And was it not worth three days' thirst to learn that lesson, to get it laid deep as a foundation for their faith? God's mercy is truest and richest, if we would but see it, in that He is willing by such sharp lessons to teach us great truths that cannot otherwise be learned. The plough must rend the clods with its keen and heavy share if the fields are to be enriched with the golden corn. Men who would build a house that is fit to live in must dig and find a firm foundation first. Herein also is love. That first, it was the lesson in *looking up*. That was for them the great lesson—and for us. It was the meaning of all God's dealing with them —of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night—they could only tell which way to go by looking up. It was the meaning of the manna. And this is the meaning of life's mysteries: of the sicknesses and wants that meet us. Look up. We are to live looking up for everything. Old GURNALL puts it very quaintly, "Some men are like the swine that never look into heaven until they are laid on their backs, and never cry for mercy until the knife is at their throat." By gentler and more gracious methods—the methods of our wants—God teaches us to look up. Sickness, with its quietness and helplessness and seriousness, has taught thousands of men to look up. I heard a little while ago of a good man who was giving the story of his conversion. "I was very ill and had to go into the hospital at Bedford," said he, "and there I began to think about things much more seriously than I had ever done before. I had time and opportunity to take stock of myself, and to see things in the light of eternity. It was doubtful if I should get better. I went from thinking to praying. I did pray to God with all my heart for light and help. Well one day the door of the infirmary was opened, and an old gentleman came in (it was Mr. HOWARD, the grandfather of Mrs. PRICE HUGHES, and a dear friend of my own), 'Good morning, my friend,' said he, 'good morning, I thought you would like to hear the news. It is glorious news. It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief; good morning, good morning.'" And he was gone. But those words came to me," said the man, "as if God spoke them to my heart by His Holy Spirit. I saw it all and accepted it all, and peace and joy filled my soul." That is the first lesson. LOOK UP.

But now let us go on with our parable, and find another lesson. The host have gathered about the water, fierce and murmuring that it should be bitter and undrinkable. Then Moses prayed to the LORD, and he found a tree that, cast into the waters, healed them and made them sweet. Now it is interesting to learn that the Bedouins are accustomed to put into such bitter water a kind of barberry that makes it drinkable, and they use the word "tree" for anything that has medicinal properties. There are besides, in other countries, plants and trees that have this quality. A German missionary on the coast of Africa tells of a spring in the mission garden that was made drinkable by throwing into it a branch of a particular tree, and that the natives cover the bottom of the newly dug wells with branches of this tree to keep the water sweet. And in Peru a plant called "Yerva" has the power to purify any water, however salt and bad. (See Geikie, vol. ii. p. 204.) *It is important to see in the incident a natural rather than a supernatural cause.* Then the sweetened waters gladdened and satisfied the people and their children and cattle. And then came the remarkable application of the parable. It was not only an incident in the history of Israel, but we read: "There He made a statute and an

ordinance for them, and there He tested them, and said, '*If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.*'"

We see in it a beautiful and blessed revelation of God. Remember how this people had come to think of God—the LORD Jehovah. In the plagues of Egypt they had seen terrible proofs of His almighty power. They had seen the forces of darkness and destruction gathered against Pharaoh. From nature He had summoned that which withered all the might of Egypt and made them powerless: Darkness and hail, and lightnings, and insect, and plagues of boils and blains and then at last the firstborn dead in every house. Later they had seen the might of Jehovah in their own deliverance and in the overthrow of Pharaoh with his horsemen and chariots. They had sung of Him: "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? who art glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them." But trust and love cannot be won by such manifestations. That's not how men learn to call God Father. Fear and awe must have filled their souls. Such terrible forces in nature might well make them afraid. *Their eyes must be opened to see in nature another ministry—tender, gentle, beneficent.* "And the LORD showed Moses a tree which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." And with every drop and draught of that sweet water came the gentle and gracious message: "*I am the LORD who heals you.*" This is why troubles and wants meet us: that they may be opportunities for our faith and God's help. Think if the Red Sea had not hemmed Israel in, and proud Pharaoh had not pursued them, how little they would have known of the greatness of their God. If they had not thirsted in the wilderness, how could they have learned of their fulness in Him?

Would that we could all learn this lesson—so easy to preach, so hard to practise—that our wealth lies in our wants. Our knowledge of God comes most largely from our needs. When the LORD Jesus was here upon earth it was the blind and the sick, the maimed and the halt, that drew forth His love and power, and lit it up for the whole world. How infinitely poorer and sadder the world would have been through all the ages if when Jesus Christ came there had been no one fevered, no little maiden sick at Jairus' home, no poor woman spent and suffering, no blind man sitting by the wayside begging. These wants have enriched the world; these sufferers have made all the ages their debtor.

All Israel is hushed and watchful while Moses prays. That's how this meek and lowly schoolmaster, Moses, is teaching them their A-B-Cs. When in doubt, when in difficulty, *PRAY. And the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.* For us that tree always waits by the bitter well; but the LORD keeps the secret, and He must show it unto us. Prayer can always heal the bitterness. We know a tree, indeed, that makes the bitter sweet, the tree whereon He hung who bore our sins in His own body. *There* is the love that never fails to sweeten life; *there* is a purpose concerning us which seems to make all well. Prayer in itself is a blessed cure for bitterness. God's Presence and God's Peace sweeten life, and though the cup be bitter, still the sight of the hand that holds the cup brings the strength and grace to drink it.

What trouble it would have saved Israel if only they had learned the meaning of the wilderness life *once for all!* Rather, what trouble it would save us if we could learn the lesson well—that life, life eternal, is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. That which teaches us more of our God is God's best gift and earth's richest possession. The abiding wealth of life is what we know of Him. It is easy to see that if Israel had only got adjusted and had fitted in exactly with God's plan, their life would have been easy and triumphant. And isn't that exactly true for us? If we would only get adjusted, and would only fit in perfectly with God's plan, how blessed our life would be! What then is God's plan and purpose? *That we be conformed to the image of His Son.* All things work together for this; all

things are set and timed to this end. We set up a notion of what is good and cry for it, and pout and murmur because we can't get it. We cry for the deadly nightshade, and think its berries must be sweet. God seeks to teach us that the only *good* is that for which all things work together—*That we be conformed to the image of His Son.*

And they came to Elim where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters. That is where the chapter ends. *And they encamped there.* That is where God always means the chapter to end—every chapter. We go to school to learn the lesson, but then we are to go home to the Father's house to dinner. Marah is on the way: but it is best to leave it on the way. Some people pitch their tents at Marah and live there. With them, to be miserable is a sign of grace; to groan is to pray; and where others sing they sigh. If ever they get a meal they "dip the parched corn in the vinegar." My brother, God's train may stop at Marah, but not for long, and certainly not for refreshments. It is not the terminus. You need not stay there; go on to Elim, *that is where God means you to encamp.*

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THE MANNA

EXODUS 16.

TODAY we reach the story of the *MANNA*. It is the next great lesson in the school of the wilderness. The children of Israel, as we are accustomed to call them, *are* but children, and as such they are dealt with—patiently, graciously—taught as we teach our children, by pictures and parables. Let us set the scene before us. Behind them is Egypt with its memories, the darker parts more vivid. We have a trick of remembering best what it is most convenient to remember. Again, the people angrily murmured at Moses, “Would God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt”; it is the hard miserable heart of unbelief that speaks here—*died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt*. Hadn’t God’s hand smitten off their fetters, and overthrown their oppressors, and brought them across the Red Sea in triumph? Wasn’t it His hand of which they had sung, “Your right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power, Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces”? And now they fret and moan, “Would God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt”? Hard thoughts of God are at the heart of all our murmuring. What a miserably blind thing this grumbling is. “When we sat by the flesh-pots and when we ate bread to the full.” What insolence! One would think that they had been independent gentlemen, and self-indulgent lords. What a picture of luxurious ease, as if they had said to themselves: “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” Why, the crack of the taskmaster’s whip would soon have been about their shoulders if they had attempted any such laziness, and the dry “You are idle” would have fetched them speedily back to the slime pits. No wonder Moses grew indignant at their murmurings. But God’s answer is in the gift of the manna. How patiently He bears with them, filling with angels’ food the mouths that murmured.

That’s how God opened their eyes to see Himself. This was the one great lesson of the wilderness, *that they should see Him who is invisible*. As long as they saw only the stretch of desert sand, the barren mountains riven and scarred, what hope was there of any bread? They are hemmed in by very despair. But the moment they saw the Almighty God with them, what chance was there of their perishing? Everything was altered then. This is the great wilderness lesson for them and for us. God’s Presence, God’s Care, God’s Provision, are ours. Do you wonder at their dullness of perception, that they should have had such deliverances, and yet should doubt? Alas that it is so much easier to see other people’s faults than to cure our own. What proofs of His faithfulness, what tokens of His power, what manifestations of His goodness have we had, and yet how persistent are these fears and doubts of ours. Mark well - fears and doubts are, so to speak, the murmurings of the heart, incipient undeveloped murmurings. As there are songs without words, so there are murmurings without mutterings.

We, too, are children who need to go to school and learn the lesson. Do let us learn that the LORD accepts the responsibility of His people. If He comes to lead them into the goodly land, He is not going to leave them to perish in the wilderness; that which He has promised, He will assuredly fulfil. Some people find it easy enough to believe the great and sublime and spiritual promises. They can understand that God should be willing to set before us glorious visions of heaven; but they fret and fear about the common things of the daily life as if these were altogether beneath His notice, and outside His thought. Don’t you see how our daily bread is wrapped up with the very name and kingdom of God in the prayer which we are taught to utter—“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” What next? “Give us this day our daily bread.” Nothing can quiet the murmurings of the heart until we learn to live a life of happy dependence upon God for everything.

In the seventh verse of this chapter there is a phrase which is very notable in connection with the manna. Here for the first time do we meet with it. *“In the morning you shall see the*

glory of the LORD.” If you take the use of this phrase in the Scriptures you will find it limited to the most sublime incidents, and it is evidently expressive of the manifested Presence of God. You find it in the tenth verse—“It came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.” Now was the wilderness transformed—glorified. This holy place became as the house of God, and the gate of heaven. Turn for the significance of the phrase to the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus, and the sixteenth and seventeenth verses—“Now the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.” Again, in Exodus 40:33-36 the phrase occurs when the tabernacle is finished and the manifested Presence of God enters into the Holy of Holies. “So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” Another reference, 2 Chron. 5:13, 14, describes the completion of the temple. “It came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers *were* as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice, . . . that the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; *for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.*” See also 2 Chronicles 7:1, 2, 3. Long afterwards, after a dreary interval, the phrase meets us again, gathering up all these memories, repeating and fulfilling them. “And the glory of the LORD shone around them, . . . Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the LORD” (Luke 2:9, 10).

It is surely a very striking fact that this phrase, limited to such special and peculiar manifestation of the Divine Presence, should be used on the occasion of the gift of the manna. We should have looked for it at the overthrow of Pharaoh amidst the splendid terrors of that night when Egypt’s pride was broken and the power destroyed. But not so. There was the command: “*Stand still, and see the salvation of God.*” But the glory of God is not in destruction, not in storm and battle. His glory is the tender care of His people, and in His gracious provision for them. “You shall see the glory of God,” and so we go forth and find it in the manna. Is it not the very picture of the Son of Man? He who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many? And is it not a beautiful association of the glory of God with the “*daily bread*” which long after, the blessed Master Himself set forth in the LORD’s Prayer?

“In the morning the dew lay all around the camp. And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground.¹⁵ So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.” So the face of the wilderness, that dreary barren waste, was covered with plenty. The wilderness and solitary place was glad for them; the desert had rejoiced and blossomed as the rose, it had blossomed abundantly. Oh, who is like unto the LORD! How blessed, how glorious a thing it is to have God to take care of us. Where no corn could grow or trembling grass-blade lift itself, there the Heavenly Father can spread a table for His children, and bid them come and eat. It is done in a night while the host slept. No ploughman had gone forth to turn the furrow; no hand had cast the seed; none went forth with sickle. They awake, and, lo, there was the gracious LORD, as long after He stood on the shore of Galilee in the early morning saying, “Come and break your fast.” It was all ready and waiting for them.

Do let us learn that God’s resources are never exhausted. Every door on earth may be shut, as they were here. Below is the desert sand, the barren rock: above, the cloudless heaven: afar off and altogether out of reach, the land of plenty. But God can always open windows in heaven. He who is the LORD of the Harvest and the Maker of Paradise is never at

such a pass that He cannot help and deliver His children. He who opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing has not taught us to call Him Father for nothing. He will acknowledge and answer to the name. *“The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”*

“This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it according to each one’s need.’” God suits His blessings to their needs and natures. “Ah,” said one, “I am a man who requires a great deal of nourishment. My little children may manage to live on this manna, but I have a large frame to keep up.” Do not fear, my hungry friend; if you need much, much shall be given, and this small round thing shall sustain you. Fear not.

“And Moses said, Let no one leave any of it till morning.” The great lesson was that of dependence—your Heavenly Father cares for you. This message was to be spoken to them every day by the voice of the manna for forty years. There is always enough for gratitude, but never enough for greed—a daily supply for a daily need. To-morrow must wait till it comes. God was teaching them to live *a day at a time*. He who rushed forth and began to scrape and pile, saying within himself, “I make hay *before* the sun shines, there is no telling what may happen to-morrow, the price may go up: I will make sure of my supply while I can,” found in the morning that *it had bred worms and stank*. Every day’s event was to lead them afresh to look up for the day’s supply. So He taught them to pray—“Our Father in Heaven, give us this day our daily bread.”

WANTS AND WARS

EXODUS 17.

THIS chapter —*WANTS and WARS* teaches us two things at the outset: that the LORD is the refuge of His people, and that He is their fortress.

We may be the people of God, redeemed at a great price, delivered with a glorious deliverance, enriched with ten thousand precious promises,—yet there are two things that will meet us as long as we live in this world—*WANTS and WARS*. God loves His children a great deal too much and a great deal too wisely ever to let them be independent of Himself. Although our Heavenly Father cares for us, He cares for us too much to let us grow negligent and lazy. So do we need wants and wars to keep us near to Him.

Have you ever thought what a blessing our *WANTS* are? They really are our wealth, because they are God's opportunity. As at the wedding in Cana, the best thing we have very often is the thing we have not—having no wine they were driven to the Master and got the best. It should be always so. The prominent virtues of our English character are largely due to our much-abused climate. It is the need of a fireside that makes us such a home-loving people—a people whose national anthem is “Home, sweet Home.” Sunny skies and soft delicious airs would never have taught us to say, “*the Englishman's house is his castle.*” Although we may not be able to sing about the north-east wind as brave Charles Kingsley did, we shall admit that its angry blustering does make one's roof a blessed shelter, and the fireside a sweet retreat; and the front-door is indeed a gate of defence when we can shut it in the face of such a foe. Think of the sea which cuts us off from everywhere—how it has helped to develop our toughness, our courage, our love of freedom. In our education and training as a nation these two things are amongst the most mighty—*WANTS and WARS*. We shall always have gifts enough to keep us thankful. We shall always have wars enough to keep us watchful. Yet these two abide—but who can tell which is the greatest?

So then let us once for all learn the folly and wickedness of thinking that our *WANTS* are tokens of God's forgetfulness, and our foes the sign of God's disfavour. The people of Israel were as dear to God in the wilderness as they were in Canaan. They were as much His chosen and redeemed people when they wanted water as when they were in the goodly land that flowed with milk and honey. The Heavenly Father loves His children on earth as much as He loves them in heaven. Here in the midst of our common needs and in the thick of our foes, He cares as much for us as for those who stand on the “*sea of glass*” having gotten the victory. Do not measure God's love by your provisions but by His promises; do not measure His favour by the fewness of your difficulties but by the greatness of His purposes.

And there is another lesson which completes the first—that God never allows us to have a need that He can't supply—He never brings into any difficulty from which He can't deliver us.

So let's turn to the story. The people are gathered at Rephidim, and once more there is no water. Angrily the men turn on Moses, not murmuring only, but even threatening his life. In answer to his prayer Moses is directed to take the elders of Israel, and go before the people, “And behold,” said the LORD, “I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb.” Here as in the case of the manna, there was a special manifestation of the glory of God. All the people were gathered to see this great sight, nearer stood the elders of Israel. In front of these was the rock: high and massive,—its rugged sides stretching up until its fretted heights stood out against the sky. Over all, dazzling and awful, was the glory of the LORD. Then Moses drew near and lifting the rod he struck the rock, and the stream poured from. As the psalmist sings, “the waters ran down like rivers,”—cool, delicious, abundant, it fell with happy music. The fevered children rushed for it eagerly, and the thirsty men and women, and found new life in it,—and from every side the flocks and herds gathered to share in the gracious supply.

Looking back upon that scene St. Paul cries—“*that Rock was Christ*” (1 Cor. 10:4). Good tidings for us pilgrims, going homeward. We are sometimes where Israel was—in the desert, parched, wearied, with faith weak, and ready to murmur, longing for a drink from the river of life, as David longed to drink of the crystal spring by Bethlehem. For us “there is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God” (Psalm 46:4). The scene seems to rise before John the Seer as if this was but the pattern of that which in its fullest glory and complete significance must be seen in the mount. “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Rev. 22:1).

We will be refreshed and blessed, to sit awhile by these waters—the tree of life bearing twelve manner of fruit grows beside the river for us.

That Rock was Christ. Let us turn to notice the use that His apostle makes of this emblem. He is warning the Christians of Corinth against being satisfied with privileges. They are not to think that their safety lies in their religious powers. Israel could boast of these. They had their baptism—“*They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.*” All—the infants as well as the adults: sprinkled by the spray and the rain. The Egyptians were immersed. Israel had their holy communion, too. “*They all ate the same spiritual meat and all drank the same spiritual drink,*”—spiritual in its origin, and in that which it signified—the manna from Heaven, and the water from the Rock. These were their sacraments—*two, not seven*, as Rome boasts. Yet these privileges and observances did not secure their entrance into the promised land, “for with many of them God was not well-pleased, and they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

That Rock was Christ—it is a beautiful emblem of the Blessed Saviour.

Look again upon this noisy rabble, fiercely clamouring against God and ready to stone Moses. What miserable forgetfulness of all that had been done for them. The LORD had brought them out of bondage. He had led them across the Red Sea. He had destroyed their enemies. He had fed them with manna. Yet in their black ingratitude all this is forgotten. Utterly blind to all God’s great purpose concerning them, they insult His majesty with their wicked murmuring. What! Should the rock melt into streams of pity for rebels like these? And well might it be so—when the Saviour of the world hung on the accursed tree—rejected, despised, crucified. Little wonder that the sun refused to look upon its Maker and shrank from such a scene of horror; and the rocky heart of earth was torn for Him. But who should pity these rebels? Yet, so it is. As the people stand with wondering eyes and parted lips, a great hush resting upon all, Moses strikes with the rod and the stream of life pours out.

That Rock was Christ. There is another crowd in which you and I are standing, men and women whom God has made for His service: the creatures of His hand, exalted to high position, crowned with glory and honour. Yet we have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Against us the sentence has gone forth. Lift up your eyes unto the hills. What shall we look for but the thunders and lightnings of Sinai? But lo! there cometh forth the glorious Son of God. Stricken and smitten that we may live. Lo! From His pierced side there flowed our life and salvation. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

That Rock was Christ. Come and let us sit in the shadow of this Rock with great delight, and think of the emblem of the Blessed LORD. *What a thing of might it is*—what endurance is here. The river flows forever, knowing no stay, but how unchangeable is the Rock. These hosts have passed away, nations have risen up into greatness and shaken the world in their might, and gone down into obscurity. Yet today explorers think they can find this very rock. The Rock—it is the emblem of the abiding. The centuries find no flaw and leave no decay. I have watched it as the storm-clouds gathered and enwrapped it with darkness, the lightnings flashed about it, the thunders rolled, and the wild winds howled and the torrents leapt down its sides. But lo! the storm was spent, and to-morrow there came the gentle dawn to find it all unmoved. I have seen it and wondered at its might, away on the coast when the wild waves that

have had their way triumphantly for many a league, lift up their heads and catch sight of this barrier. Hissing their rage they have risen arched and majestic, and gathered all their strength, and hurled in rapturous shout against the foe. But lo! only to be dashed into showers of harmless spray, and the streams go hurrying down the rock as if in haste to hide their shame. And to-morrow cooing ripples play about its feet and the sun bathes it with golden light. *That Rock was Christ — the Rock of Ages.* Let us exult in our glorious LORD. The unchanging Christ: the unchangeable. Be bold in Him. Rest with a blessed sense of safety in Him. Built into this Rock of Ages, the rains may beat and winds may blow, but the house of our faith shall stand. It is built on a rock—and more than that *in the Rock*—and this *Rock is Christ*.

Look up again and note *what sweet touches of tenderness there are about this Rock*. With mighty front defying the storms, with its foundation immeasurably deep—yet what gentleness is here. Look how it flings its generous shadow over the flocks and on the wearied ones that rest in the languid noon. Itself receives the scorching sun that it may yield the shade, catching the fiery darts and quenching them that these may rest in safety. Or when rains beat and winds blow within its depth there is shelter because itself bears the heat and fury of the storm. *That Rock was Christ*. O blessed shelter! O kindly shade! O safest Refuge! He has borne the heat and burden of the day; about Him has swept the fierceness of the storm. In the crevice of the rock the trembling flower bell finds its home, and the dainty fern springs up in its shade; and in its cleft the bird finds a place for her young and the dove unfearful murmurs its sweet contentment. *That Rock was Christ*. A Rock with clefts wherein we hide. Who can tell of His tenderness. Almighty, and yet how pitiful. Here is shelter and a home for the timid soul. Here trust and love can cling, safe from every threat.

But look at the Rock again as from its smitten side there flows the water for these thirsty thousands. *How abundant it is*. Mr. MOFFAT tells us that when wandering in South Africa, parched with dreadful thirst, the quick instinct of the cattle told them when water was near, and they would set off in frantic eagerness, and reaching the pool would fight over it and by their splashing spoil the little water that there was. Not so is it here. This is a river that flows in generous abundance. No one needed to go without; no one had any difficulty in reaching it. No feeble old man was thrust back by the crowd. No timid woman stood in the outskirts of the multitude. No little children went crying for water. It came with glorious abundance, leaping into delicious music, spreading out into the still pool; here gathered up for a swift run; here sloping above the fall, and then leaping over it; here laughing about the stones. It is the blessed picture of our salvation— *that Rock was Christ*. In Him is no scanty dole of pardon; no begrudged and niggardly gift. It is a river of salvation, plenteous redemption, waves and billows of forgiveness, an ocean of love. “I have buried your sins in the depths of the sea.” Soul, if you come to the water of life, drink deep, do not sip only, drink, drink, and drink again.

Besides that, *it was free*. Whosoever wanted to could come and drink. The murmurer’s tongue was cooled by it. The hand that was lifted to stone Moses was washed and cleansed by it. *That Rock was Christ*. The water of life is ours—yours and mine. Everyone who thirsts may come and is welcome. I have read somewhere of a ship in the tropics in which the sailors were perishing with thirst. They had hung up the sail to catch the dew and wring it out. At last they spied a sail in the distance, and hoisted eagerly the flag of distress. The ship hastened to their help, and, as it came near, they hoarsely cried, *Water*. And the answer came, “Water! Why, all you have to do is to *dip it up. Dip it up.*” There it was, a good hundred fathoms under them. As far as eye could see, to the right and to the left of them, there was fresh water. They were in the mouth of the Amazon River. *Dip it up, dip it up.*

And yet again. *The water followed them*. In all their wanderings it went with them. Wherever the tent was pitched, there the babbling brook went in their midst, the crystal river sang beside them, making glad the City of God (Psalm 46:4). So is the influence of that abiding Presence with us. By night and by day, in all our way, “Lo,” says He, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” *That Rock was Christ*.

Such is the first part of the chapter. We can but lightly touch on the second part. In the first part the LORD is the refuge of His people. In the second part He is their fortress. We must run to Him from our wants; and in Him we must turn and fight our foes. Joshua goes out against the Amalekites, and Moses sits on the rock with hands uplifted to Heaven. And, lo! the victory is Israel's; and the Amalekites are over thrown. So is it that our Captain is at the same time our Leader upon earth and our Advocate on High, ever at the right hand of God making intercession for us.

And so is it that the chapter which begins with wants and wars, ends with supply and victory.

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COMFORT AND REST

EXODUS 18.

THE last chapter was entitled "*WANTS and WARS.*" The scene was of Israel murmuring for want of water; the manifested glory of God upon the rock; the solemn gathering of Israel and the elders before it; the smiting of the rock and thence the flow of the abundant stream. The chapter ended with the coming of the Amalekites. It was Israel's first battle, and that with a practised and strong foe, who knew every vantage point, and quick to avail themselves of it. But beside that chapter there should always be this one: let Exodus 17 and 18 stand side by side, for they are the completion of each other. If the first is *WANTS and WARS* we may call the second *COMFORT and REST*. While it is true that God loves us too much to let us be independent of Him, yet it is also true that God loves us too much to let us wander through the wilderness without a thousand sweet tokens of His love. If Amalek came to worry and harass Israel, then, on the other side, came the prince and priest of the Midianites with kindest greetings and wise counsel. A well of love sprang up in the desert, fresh and beautiful, that must have been peculiarly refreshing to the heart of Moses.

It will be well for us to think of him as he was at this time. We have seen the murmuring host that follows him, ready to lose heart at every threatening ill—ready indeed to stone him in their rage; failing altogether to perceive the great purpose of God concerning their nation, and very slow to follow his guidance. What fellowship could there be between this great leader and his people? A whole heaven above them he stood alone, with scarcely a man that he could call in for counsel or to whom he could entrust any command. Joshua seems to be the only man of kindred spirit. The very training of Moses kept him aloof from these slaves—his ways were not as their ways, nor his thoughts as their thoughts. His sublime faith in God, so miraculously nurtured, so severely disciplined, and again so miraculously confirmed—all this severed him as a man who trod another earth and dwelt beneath another heaven. His life in the court of Pharaoh, his learning in all the varied knowledge of the Egyptians, his courage and skill, his gifts as one "*mighty in words and deeds,*" his loftiness of thought and purpose—all this was a great gulf between Moses and the people. Think of this man who knew his God and to where He was leading them, in contact with this frightened and grumbling mob, a murmur on their every lip. How wearying and irritating it is to deal with such a set comes out in the life of *Sir FRANCES DRAKE*, that fearless leader of men. "By God's grace," he cried, "I can fight the Spaniards, and fevers and storms; but *for a grumbler there is nothing but the yard-arm.*" And there in the rough and ready fashion of that day, the grumbler swung. How greatly would it reduce the population if a similar penalty were attached to grumbling today! But think of this Moses all day long amidst a people whom no deliverance, no splendid manifestation of the Divine Presence could uplift, much less transform. How wearied he must have been; how sick at heart; how utterly alone. And when the day was done with its clamouring and strife, does he sit beneath the clear heavens and think sometimes of all that might have been; of all that he had surrendered for Israel's sake? How much he had given up for these thankless people! And in that loneliness, do thoughts yet deeper and more tender than these come to him? Does he dream of the wife and children whom he had left in Midian? Were they still living; would he ever see them again? Thus rises this man of God before us, so lonely, so lofty, so enduring.

Now let us turn to the incident that this chapter records. Across the peninsula of Sinai, on the gulf which bounds the farther side of it, lived the Midianite nation—Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, being their prince and priest. Tidings have reached Jethro of the wonderful deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt; and later come the tidings of the march through the wilderness. The old chief takes with him his daughter Zipporah, the wife of Moses, and her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, and goes out to meet the people of Israel. He

finds them in the heart of the mountains of Sinai, encamped by *the Mount of God*. No doubt, Jethro was attended by such a retinue as would mark his dignity as well as secure his safety from wandering hordes—his coming would be a cause of much excitement to Israel. The message is brought to Moses, “You father-in-law Jethro has come, and your wife and two sons.” It was a strange greeting to break upon him in so lonely a place. And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and greeted his wife and sons. And they asked one another of their welfare; and then came into the tent.

Moses tells them of all that God had done for them. What a story it was—the plagues by which Jehovah had smitten Egypt until proud Pharaoh was compelled to let the people go; the triumphant crossing of the Red Sea; the travail that they had found by the way; and more joyfully he told of how the LORD had delivered them. How sweet it was to forget the toil in these happy memories; to have those about him to whom he could unfold his heart. As Jethro listened he rose up reverently and said, “Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.” Then, probably while all Israel stood watching and worshipping, Jethro took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God. “And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God.” What a picture it is, this holy feast, all joy, all gratitude, all praise. What a contrast to the wants and wars. And sharing in the joy, as none else could, was Israel’s leader Moses with his wife and sons. That is the way in which God gladdens His people. He taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, and in those that hope in His mercy.

The beauty of the scene is completed by the place at which it occurred. When Moses had wandered in the wilderness, leading his flock as the shepherd away to the verge of the desert, there had appeared to him the vision of the burning bush: God met with him there, and gave him the commission for the deliverance of Israel. Moses was appalled by the greatness of the work, and the sense of his own weakness; and cried, “Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” Then came the gracious answer—“Certainly I will be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God *on this mountain*.” And now as Moses once more comes to the Mount of God there meets him this token of “the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush.” (Deut. 33:16). There they feasted together and celebrated the goodness of God.

It is very interesting to trace the results of this friendship through all the history of Israel. Moses earnestly requested his father-in-law to stay with them. And when he was about to depart to his own land and to his own kindred Moses begged him not to leave them. As the son of the desert he would know his way over the trackless waste, would lead them to the best places for encampment, and “*you can be our eyes*.” And for his own sake Moses urges him to stay with them. ““We are setting out for the place of which the LORD said, ‘I will give it to you.’ Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the LORD has promised good things to Israel.” . . . And it shall be, if you go with us—indeed it shall be—that whatever good the LORD will do to us, the same we will do to you.” (Numbers 10:29-33). Jethro departs for a while, perhaps to arrange for the journey with Israel, and to select those who should accompany him; for we find the Kenites living among the Israelites from that time on, dwelling in tents and drinking no wine—so closely one with Israel, yet retaining their Arab customs, and often distinguished alike for their fidelity to God and to the ways of their fathers.

The results of this kindly interview shine out from the pages of Scripture again and again. “Now the children of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which *lies* in the South *near* Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people” (Judges 1:16). The memory of the incident lives on long after—“And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD your God; and the rest we

have utterly destroyed” (1 Sam. 15:15). Of this race comes that Jabez who was more honourable than his brethren; and Jonadab whom Jehu took with him when that furious driver went forth to destroy the worshippers of Baal. Their faithfulness to the teaching of their fathers is turned to account by Jeremiah in sharp contrast with Israel’s forgetfulness of God; the prophet goes to the dwelling of the Rechabites and sets pots of wine before them and bids them drink. But these brave abstainers refused. *“We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, ‘You shall drink no wine, you nor your sons, forever. You shall not build a house, sow seed, plant a vineyard, nor have any of these; but all your days you shall dwell in tents, that you may live many days in the land where you are sojourners.’”* Their obedience is rewarded of God, and Jonadab the son of Rechab is never to be without a son to stand before the LORD for ever. DEAN STANLEY tells us that in the final siege of Jerusalem a band of wild Arabs are seen in the streets, dwelling in tents, drinking no wine. They are the children of Jonadab the son of Rechab the Kenite that came of Hamath, the father of the house of Rechab.

And Jethro not only brought pleasant friendship and fellowship to Moses, but some common-sense advice which had much to do with his own comfort and the prosperity of Israel. Jethro sees how that Moses sat all day long to judge the people, from morning until evening. “What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?” he asked. *Alone*—it is in keeping with all that we know of the man. The consciousness of a calling quite distinct from those about him in the early years of his life—of a purpose so opposed to the interests of those in the palace of Pharaoh; those long and lonely years in Midian—all the training of his life had taught Moses to keep his own counsel, and to act on his own prompting. At a stroke the wise and venerable Jethro gave him a perfect system of councils—a parish council, with its mayor over from ten to fifteen families; the town council, with its magistrate over hundreds; the county council, with ruler over thousands. And over all was Moses as the judge in all matters of appeal. What a load was taken off the shoulders of the leader; and what a blessing set upon the shoulders of the others. Now Moses can go on his way another man; now he shall live to bring the people to the verge of the goodly land, his eye not dimmed, nor his natural force abated.

So stand the chapter of the *COMFORT and REST* beside that of the *WANTS and WARS*. God is glad to light our lives with friendship and kindly counsel. Wants and wars there may be, but there shall be the comfort and rest too, with which our Father refreshes His children in the wilderness.

IN this chapter we reach the record of the greatest event in the life of Moses. That he should rise up from the midst of the splendours of Pharaoh's court, and go from that high position to become one with these poor enslaved and spirit-broken Israelites, was much indeed. It was much, very much, that he should be called of God, and commissioned to demand the release of Israel, and to bring them out from the house of their bondage. It was much that he should have stood and spoken to the waters of the Red Sea in the name of Jehovah, and have taken so great a part in Israel's deliverance and the overthrow of Egypt's hosts. It was much that he should have led so vast a multitude in the trackless wilderness. But of all honours ever put upon man, this surely was the greatest—*God gave the Law by Moses*. If the supreme advantage of the Jew was that to him were committed the oracles of God, how great was his honour to whom it was given to climb the Mount of God, to enter into the majesty of the Divine Presence, and to receive from the Almighty those tables of the Law which were to inspire and shape the religious life of the world. Every aspect of the scene demands our earnest and careful consideration.

I. *The greatness of the event appears if we recall the purpose of God for His people.* The whole history of Israel, their origin and their training, is that God may have in them a nation through whom He can declare His mind and will to the world. They are to be His witnesses. The Law of God was to become incorporated with the very life of the people. It was to be wrought into the fibre of their being; and to control their lives to the minutest details. Canaan, where they were going, was the chosen home of a chosen people; it was the fenced vineyard, as Isaiah calls it (Isaiah 5:1. 2); but this was the vine out of Egypt, created by the Heavenly Husbandman; Canaan was to develop and mature that which was implanted in the hearts of Israel at Sinai. The great life-purpose of this people begins with the giving of the Law.

II. *Notice further that all the previous dealings of God with Israel have been a preparation for this.* God did not begin with the commandments. He first made them free, and then He gave them the Law. The whole history is a striking illustration of St. Paul's words, "Being made free from sin, we became the servants of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). It is impossible for us to think of Israel beginning to keep these great commandments in Egypt. We need only recall their ignorance of God, and their utter misery. It is impossible to get faith when hope is dead. Workers in missions will tell you that to create hope is the first and hardest thing—to stir men out of the awful apathy of a dulled and stupefied despair. Then we have to remember how their surroundings were full of heathenism with its vice and degradation. The cruelty of the taskmasters would have found a new strength and bitterness if they had been provoked by the insult done to the gods of Egypt. The religion of Jehovah might live in such conditions, but it is very difficult to conceive of the Jewish religion *commencing* under such conditions. First of all, God brings hope. He brings liberty. He smites at the chains of their bondage. He as their Champion takes up their case and proves Himself to be their Friend and Deliverer. He manifests His greatness in acts which must have appealed most powerfully to their imagination, and made even their passions, which seem to have been the only elements of energy left in them, to take the side of faith in Himself. The terrors of God as seen in the plagues of Egypt, the thunder and lightning and hail, the death of the firstborn, must have turned the very fear of the slaves—the faculty most readily appealed to—into confidence in God. By the sudden and complete deliverance from the perils which hemmed them in on every hand at the Red Sea, there was inspired a new faith and yet a greater sense of triumph. And not only in such scenes of greatness and power did the God of Israel reveal Himself—the wilderness with its dreary stretch where was neither bread nor water had

compelled them to look up for their daily supply; and unfailingly had been given the manna from heaven; and the river from the rock followed them. Day by day and night by night there rose before them the pillar of God's Presence, their guide, their guard, their glory. Thus He had made Himself known to them.

And that's how our God deals with us. He reveals Himself as our Father before He asks our obedience. Before He asks for our faith, He shows us that He cares for us with all love and tenderness. As *Dr. DALE* says, "His Gospel comes to us even before His law."

This is the ground on which God bases His appeal to Israel for their obedience. "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

III. *Very remarkable is the fitness of the place with the majesty of the scene.*

DEAN STANLEY has pictured it with such vividness and force that I can't refrain from giving his description: "Onwards and upwards after their long halt (at Rephidim). Exulting in their first victory, they advanced deeper and deeper into the mountain ranges they knew not whither. They knew only it was for some great end, for some mighty sacrifice, for some solemn disclosure, such as they had never before witnessed. Onwards they went and the mountains closed around them; upwards through winding valley and under higher cliff and over rugged pass and through gigantic forms; and at last through all the different valleys, the whole body of the people were assembled. On their right hand and on their left rose long successions of lofty rocks, forming a vast avenue, like the approaches which they had seen leading to the Egyptian temple between colossal figures of men and gods. At the end of this broad avenue, rising immediately out of the level plain on which they were encamped, towered the massive cliffs of Sinai, like the huge altar of some natural temple, encircled by peaks of every shape and height, the natural pyramids of the desert. In this sanctuary, secluded from all earthly things, raised high even above the wilderness itself, arrived, as it must have seemed to them, at the very end of the world, they waited for the revelation of God." . . . "That such a plain should exist at all in front of such a cliff is so remarkable a coincidence with the sacred narrative as to furnish a strong internal argument, not merely of its identity with the scene, but of the scene having been described by an eye-witness. The awful and lengthened approach, as to some natural sanctuary, would have been the fittest preparation for the coming scene. The low line of alluvial mounds at the foot of the cliff exactly answers to the 'bounds' which were to keep the people off from 'touching the mount.' The plain itself is not broken and uneven and narrowly shut in like almost all others in the range, but presents a long retiring sweep against which the people could 'remove and stand afar off.' The cliff rising like a huge altar in front of the whole congregation, and visible against the sky in lonely grandeur from end to end of the whole plain, is the very image of 'the mount that might be touched,' and from which the 'voice' of God might be heard far and wide over the stillness of the plain below." *SINAI and PALESTINE* by Dean Stanley - pp. 42, 43.

In such a place, so strangely fitted for such an occasion, the hosts of Israel are gathered. For three days their expectation has been quickened, and their minds have been solemnized by the preparation for the great event. They move under the hush and awe of some coming mystery, all the more impressive because it is so unique. Now breaks the morning of the third day. And on the high cliff that rises up to heaven there gather the black clouds. Now lightnings play incessantly, and the tempest sweeps and roars. The scene is one of sublime majesty. "There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that were in camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God: and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." Then forth from the depth of the darkness and in the midst of the terrors came the voice Divine in the ears of all the people.

"God spoke all these words, saying: I *am* the LORD your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them."

And all the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings and noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking.

The scene is set before the people long after in the words of Moses (Deut. 4:9 - 12). And yet much longer afterward the author of the Epistle of the Hebrews places the scenes of Sinai and Zion side by side (Hebrews 12:18-24)—“For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

Thus the Law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. What contrast could be greater? Let us look at the lonely wilderness again—far from the haunts of men and every trace of life. Let the rugged height of Sinai rise before us, awful in its solitude. Again let us listen to the roll of thunders, and let the lightnings blaze about us. Then let us hasten away to the lake of Galilee; the houses thickly cluster about the shore, and the fishing boats dot the surface of the lake. Here is another mount—how all unlike the mount of Sinai—gay with the flowers, the red and white and lilac, and the golden lily everywhere. The song of the birds fills all the air. We look forth upon the scene of beauty arched by the deep blue sky, and the blue waters of the lake stretching away to the distant hills. All peace, all gladness, as if God had spoken His own “*Fear not*” to the earth. And here in the quiet morning sits the lowly Prophet of Nazareth, and He opened His mouth from Heaven and taught them saying: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*” In the singing of the birds and in the beauty of the flowers He finds the lessons of the Father; He comes to cure our very care, to heal our anxieties. “*Don’t be anxious,*” He says; “your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.” And lo! as we sit at His feet we find grace and truth. In Him is the mind and will of God as nothing else can declare it. And in Him is grace for us to *be* that which we see; grace to *do* that which we hear; grace that this light from Heaven may become the very life on earth. The love of Jesus Christ is more binding than the law of Moses. Love is the most sacred obligation. Love makes law no more a law—yet multiplies a thousand times its power and authority. A glad *I will*: and overwhelming *I must*. No choice, no thought, but *to do His will*—an utter and complete surrender. “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

THE ANGEL AND THE WAY

"Behold, I send an Angel before you." —EXODUS 23:20.

"By little and little." —ver. 30

IT is almost startling to come upon these words here, *"By little and little."* God has come down in the most sublime majesty that earth had ever seen. The Scriptures speak of the Law as given by the ministry of angels; the psalmist sings, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place" (Ps.68:17). Amidst such dread sway of splendour the great purpose of Israel has been declared;—they are the redeemed of the LORD, and are to go forth as His people. The great principles which are to govern them have been laid down: the laws by which all nations are to be regulated, relating to persons and property as well as to religion, have been proclaimed. Now let them go up and take possession of the goodly land. Why should they delay?

Then in the twentieth verse of the chapter there comes a sudden change, in which precepts give place to promises. The Law sinks into gracious tendencies; instead of the stern *"thou shalt"* and *"thou shalt not,"* there comes the gracious word, *"Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."* . . . *"Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land."* And if, like Israel, we ask of the Angel—"Please tell me your name"—this surely is the answer, *"The Angel of His Presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old"* (Isaiah 63:9.).

There are here two lessons which we shall do well to treasure. First, *That God never gives His law without His angel.* Second, *That God's angel leads us little by little into the possession which is prepared for us.*

I. God never gives His law without His angel. The two are never separated. God's will is never severed from His power. Duty is always hand in hand with strength. Right and might keep step and time. If ever there is revealed to us the goodness that *should* be, look again, and waiting close at hand is the grace that it *may* be. So, grace and truth came even in old time. Moses gave the Law, but there came Another who could turn the Law into life and into love.

It is perilous to separate the Law of God from the angel of His Presence. There is a twofold peril. Together with the Law we need that Presence to keep us from Pharisaism on the one hand, and from despair on the other. Look at the two men of whom the blessed Master tells us, who went up into the temple to pray. The Pharisee sunning his righteousness in the full blaze of day, and in the eyes of the admiring crowd—exact in his dress, in his look, in his tone, in his attitude, he stood and *prayed thus with himself*—"God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." The other is all guilt and despair; he seems to hear every commandment clamouring aloud for his condemnation. With head hung down he could but smite upon his breast and cry, *"God be merciful to me, the sinner."* On the one side stands the man who had kept the law and it had clothed him with self-righteousness. Listen to the *"I, I, I"*—all a flashing, polished capital I. This was the origin of that black and hopeless Pharisaism at which the LORD of Heaven hurled His terrible denunciation. Of all pride, this is the most accursed—the pride of religion, the conceit of goodness. If a man carries a heart of stone with the ten commandments graven upon it, how proud shall he be who is so religious; yet how hard, how pitiless, how scornful. And if on the other hand the law do but bring me in all the dread majesty of Heaven its stern *"thou shalt"* and *"thou shalt not,"* alas how vainly do I struggle in my own strength to obey. I hear but the thunders of Sinai; I read the words by the lightnings that terrify me. But lo! after the terrors of fire and earthquake and whirlwind there comes a still small voice—*Behold, behold I send My Angel before you.* Then the word "law" is

melted into love: then piety is together with pity; then righteousness becomes an eager longing to help and bless others. Look at Saul of Tarsus—as *touching the law blameless*—yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter; consenting to the death of Stephen, binding and delivering into prison both men and women. But then comes the angel of God’s Presence and how transformed is he. Listen to the words which he writes to the Church of Thessalonica—*“We were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children: So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. . . . You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”* Here is no more only the hard table of the Law, but the Angel of His Presence lives and moves in him.

Let this be our strength and joy that the two do always go together. I look at the Law, divided by its numerals, hard and exact. And I, being so foolish, so forgetful, so fickle, so false, how can I keep in innermost spirit the commandment of the Most High? *To will* is present with me, *sometimes*; but my will needs another, truer, holier Will to be brought into it. The picture of some little lad at school comes to mind. Before him is the hard question in arithmetic. All these black letters and rigid figures—they have no eyes that can pity; no lips that can smile, no hands that can help—nothing that can put any hope into the little fellow’s heart. Fixed, hard, stony, the figures are set don on the slate, but all is confusion and failure. The sum is blotted and smeared. Everything is wrong. And now the little lad despairs. It is no good his trying. What does the little one want? Not the master who draws a cross over it all and thunders angrily—that will only make it harder than ever. Here comes some gentle mistress who takes the poor little scholar on her knee, and holds the little hand in hers. How different the question is when she speaks it; she seems to take off all its hardness, and the figures seem to lose their dreadfulness when she puts them down. She talks as if the poor little scholar were not such a dreadful dunce after all. Hope comes into the heart from that cheery presence. Step by step they go through it together—mistakes are patiently pointed out and corrected. At last there it is—triumphantly right. The little lad looks up with beaming eyes and thinks he could do anything with somebody like this to help him always. “There,” cries the cheery teacher, “You know, you should always ask me to help you when you can’t understand.”

These tables of stone—they have no pity, no help; no softening words of explanation. That is not all. It never can be all. Our God cannot only give us laws. “Behold, I send my Angel.” Not only comes that stern “*thou shalt*” from without, but within there is a holy prompting, the whispered hope, the strengthening with might of His Spirit; the tenderness; and our confidence grows sound and triumphant until we cry, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” For us this word is spoken. Let our hearts be glad and sing aloud with this assurance—“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.”

The second part completes the exquisite tenderness of the lesson. *Little by little the Angel of God’s Presence leads us up to inherit what is prepared for us.*

It’s much indeed, that the infinite God can find any place in His thoughts for little things. It seems scarcely in keeping with our ideas of might and majesty to do that which is little. Leading so favoured a people, for whom so great things had been done, to whom such great purposes were entrusted, we look for a swift, splendid, complete triumph, as when He said, *Let there be light*, and there was light. But here, not so. Israel is to be led *Little by little*.

Isn’t this the only way Israel can be brought unto the knowledge of God, and into the way of His commandments? The idea of holiness can’t be created by words spoken amidst such majesty as that of Sinai. It must be revealed gradually, and deepened, and developed. The idea of sin can’t be created by thunders and lightnings and the voice as of a great trumpet. These may fill the soul with terror, awe, remorse, despair. But the grace of penitence is of another

origin and nature. The thoughts of the better life, and the longings and efforts after it are of slow and subtle growth. So is it that the people of Israel had to dwell amidst symbols, sacrifices, priests, altars, until *little by little* they would learn the facts of sin, of atonement, and cleansing. Little by little—it is the only way of teaching anything. The master who thinks himself too great to teach his scholars their A-B-C's will never get his scholars any farther. Our Heavenly Father makes ladders for us up to Himself, as Jacob saw in his vision of old, and with little steps that little feet can climb. If we wait until we can fly, as many do, we will never get up to Him at all.

Look at the example of our Blessed LORD —how He revealed the truth to His disciples gradually, as they were able to hear it. He began with parables—and with miracles which are but acted parables. Thus He gained their confidence, and enlarged their expectation, and later He taught them of His divinity, of His crucifixion, of His resurrection, and of the mission to the Gentiles.

Little by little.—How few of the world's greatest leaders would ever have attempted anything if at the outset they had seen all that their work involved, and if they had seen whither their way would lead. If LUTHER and WESLEY had seen the end of their work at its beginning, it is impossible to think that they would have dared to begin it. God lets us see the sunny distance on the mountains afar off, but lets the mists lie over the valley between. One of JOHN WESLEY's ablest critics has complained that he lacked what he calls the retro-prospective faculty—the stepping back that he might look forward; the steeping outside his work that he might see it all. That defect was his best gift. It was only because he saw a day at a time that he went on. If we saw too much of our work at once, we should either be impatient of the processes that lead to success; or we should despair in face of all that it was to cost. If you could tell a child beginning to walk that he would have to walk as far as round the world if he lived to be twenty years of age, the little one might be too frightened to begin. And yet an average of four miles a day for seventy years would convey us more than four times round the world.

Little by little—there is in the words a godlike confidence and patience. We hinder most frequently perhaps by our eagerness. We are afraid of contingencies, accidents. We have no faith, and therefore want to get the thing finished and done with. I fear many families—especially among religious people—are spoiled because they want to turn out finished ideals at the beginning. We think we can run the poor little children into moulds like jellies and turn them out exactly according to the desired pattern. But we can't. Human nature is not made that way. There is an individuality in it—a capital I, that only stiffens if defied, and that you cannot ignore. We must adopt God's method, and have faith in the power of quiet influences, unmarked and unmeasured, accumulating day after day. I met the other day with a very interesting paper on cumulative vibration. Amongst the experiments described was one in which a weight of half a ton was suspended, and against it in short and regular intervals a little ball of cork hung by a silken thread was struck. Little by little the vibration set up by the light touch of the ball spread throughout the mass until it was set in motion. Little by little—it is the noiseless and infinitely gentle and gracious way in which God deals with us.

Notice, in conclusion the *law of possession* that is here laid down—“*Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.*” *Increase and inherit*—that is the law—God only gives us what we can occupy and turn to account. There can be no absentee landlord. “I want more earth,” cried the plant. “Well,” says Nature, “push your roots out farther and down deeper and you shall find it.” “I want more of light and air,” it cried again. “Very well,” came the answer, “push up the stem, and unfold leaf and flower, and it is yours.” The only way to get more is to *grow* more. *Increase and inherit.* We only possess what we use.

THE VISION OF GOD

"They saw God, and they ate and drank." —EXODUS 24:11.

THERE is very much in this chapter that should claim our meditation, and that can't fail to minister to our spiritual life. It is well to remind ourselves that our study of the Old Testament is not a matter of antiquarian research, merely an interesting record of what happened so many hundreds of years ago. "For whatsoever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). This chapter in Exodus is certainly within that "whatsoever," and is especially interesting as containing the record of the first Scripture, and the first reference to the Book of God. In the fourth verse we read: *And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD*. This is "the origin of the first portion of Holy Scripture that ever existed as such, whatever writings may now or afterwards have been incorporated in the Pentateuch", according to CHADWICK. And again in the seventh verse we read, *And Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people*. So begins the writing and so begins the reading of the Book of the LORD.

We cannot but dwell for a minute or two at this point. Here springs up that river "*whose streams make glad the city of God*" (Ps. 46:4). From this point it flows like the rivers of Eden, north, south, east and west; and of it we may say "that it skirts the whole land where there is gold: and the gold of that land is good." Stand at the spring, and think of the myriads who have drunk of the stream by the way, and have lifted up the head. Think how many have been made wise unto salvation; what doubts have been dispelled; what revelations have been given; what faith has been inspired; what triumphs won! Wherever the river comes there is life. The origin of the River Thames has been marked —(it flows by the city of London, bearing the products of all nations, passing all the rivers of the world for its historic interest and mercantile importance). Well, we may set a mark *here*. Here is the beginning of the written Word. Here is the beginning of the Book of God.

But what arrests our attention most of all in this chapter is the record of THE VISION OF GOD. "*Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity... They saw God and they ate and drank.*"

It will be well for us to recall the account of the vision of God with which the sojourn of Israel at Sinai begins. Turn to Exodus 19:16 —"*Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled . . . Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.*" And again in Exodus 20:18—"*Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*" And, lo, we turn to Exodus chapters 24 - 34 and there comes this wonderful change: *They saw God*. Here is no terror; no flying from His Presence; no awe; no peril—"they saw God and did eat and drink."

Here is rest. Here is satisfaction. Here is companionship. What has brought about so great a change? It's like that of which Isaiah sings, "*O LORD, You were angry with me*" (Isa. 12:1). The black clouds gathered, lightnings flashed, and thunder shook the very earth: the wild rains swept down the hillsides and the whirlwind raged in its fury. You were angry; but now Your anger is turned away. The clouds are broken up, shot through with sunshine and edged with gold; the blue sky spreads overhead; the very rain has hung the trees with gems and sown the grass with orient pearls. All nature bursts into a new song and music rings on every side. "*Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.*" Such is the very figure of the

change here. The sapphire blue is in place of the darkness and smoke; the clearness of the very heaven is in place of the fire. What lies between the two that can explain the change?

Before we find the answer let us notice that the natural thought of God is precisely what first met Israel at Sinai. Lightnings, thunders, and fire are the symbols that depict Him. The very thought of God is terror: His Presence is a torment. But lo, God speaks. They who come nearest and listen, discern an order and a rightness in the words of His Law. He who has "ears to hear" perceives, running through the commandments, the Presence of One who comes down to gird life with security, and to crown it with blessedness. There is a protective care bending over the man and his family, and all belonging to him, which makes them sacred. The Almighty sets Himself for the protection of the weak, and for the maintenance of the right against the wrong-doer everywhere. That is the beginning of the vision of God. He is no arbitrary sovereign sitting on the throne of the universe, demanding obedience to His own will under threat of pains and penalties. He says, "*Come, let us reason together.*" He deals with us as those whose confidence must be won. The Law cannot show us God, but the Law can and does show us the righteousness and beneficence and wisdom of God. The Law cannot show us God, but without the Law we cannot know God. *God spoke to the people*: that was the beginning of the vision. It always is. God reveals Himself to us first of all in His Word. We must hear His voice, or we can't so much as lift up our eyes unto heaven. He must speak to us, so that we may learn to speak to Him. He who does not hear God cannot see Him: to hear rightly is to begin to see.

The next step was *the surrender of themselves to the will of God*. "Then Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." There must be a deep earnest purpose of obedience; the will must be set on God's side before the vision can be ours. This is ever the next step in the vision.

But this is not all. *There is the building of the altar*. Around it are set twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then the sacrifices are brought to the altar and slain upon it, and half the blood is sprinkled on the altar, and half the blood is sprinkled on the people. That is the next step. There is need for us to consider it carefully. We can scarcely fail to hear the word of God; we all have something of that gracious prompting of the Holy Spirit which shapes itself in a purpose of obedience. But we may stop short of the altar and the sacrifice. This great truth runs through the whole Book from Genesis to Revelation—*without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins* (Hebrews 9:22). I may not be able to say why it should be so; my perceptions of righteousness, alas, are dulled; but no man can honestly go through this Book without realizing that no vision of God can be ours without the altar, and the sacrifice and the sprinkled blood. It meets us at the very outset. Cain and Abel come to worship—the one with the first-fruits of the earth, the other with a lamb for a burnt offering. To the one is given no token of acceptance; to the other comes the light of God's favour. It meets us through all the pages of the Scriptures until in the last book we hear the song of the redeemed who have gone up into the mount and do see God, and eat and drink: "*You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood*" (Rev.5:9). And as we hope to be amongst those blessed ones, we ask, "Who are these, and where did they come from?" The answer comes, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The cloud of darkness can never give place to the sapphire blue of heaven until the sacrifice is brought and the blood is sprinkled. This and this only is the way up to the Vision of God—the word heard, the will surrendered, past the altar whereon the sacrifice is laid for our sins; then came the vision,—*they saw God, and they ate and drank*. Some symbol of His Presence rose before them, and into their heart was borne a consciousness of His favour. He brought them into His banqueting chamber, and His banner over them was love. It was no blinding and bewildering glory that met them, but they entered into the Father's House where was bread enough and to spare. God was graciously at home with them, and they were at home with Him. In His Presence they found rest, refreshment,

gladness. This is what our God would be to us, a resting-place, a home, to which we pass up out of the bewildering mysteries of life. We are to know the blessed shelter of His Presence, to hide under the shadow of His wings, compassed with His favour as with a shield. We are to rest and delight ourselves in Him.

Now let us turn to Hebrews 10:19—*“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”* How much more gloriously may our vision of God be than it could be theirs! *“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”* If in the Law there are such hints and whispers of God’s pity and righteousness and love, what vision is ours since He has spoken to us by His Son! What measure of love, what fulness of grace do meet us in Him! If as men listened to His voice in the Law they made answer, “All that the LORD has spoken will we do,” what is our reply? If in times past the sacrifice and sprinkled blood availed to fit men for the vision of God, what waits for us when we enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus! If in that long ago morning they saw the sapphire blue and the glory of God’s Presence, and ate and drink, what high privilege is ours since He is with us – He in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily! How much closer and sweeter and richer and fuller is the intimacy that may be ours. For us, if we will have it, is that abiding Presence, that vision of God undimmed and unbroken. “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:23). So in Jesus Christ may that vision of God be ours, forever fitting us for yet further and fuller revelation of God to the soul.

THE STORY OF THE GOLDEN CALF

EXODUS 32 ; DEUT.9:7-21 ; PSA.56:19-23.

IN this incident we have the record of what must have been the supreme trial of his life to Moses, and the manifestation of Israel's deepest sinfulness. Yet it is the opportunity of bringing out the greatness of the man's character. He shows a sublimity of devotion to Israel such as stands unapproached save in the cry of the crucified Saviour—*"Father, forgive them: they know not what they do."*

The people are still at Sinai. The cloud of Divine Presence lingered there on the mount. Within them lived the memory of that dread appearance—of when God descended amidst the thunder and lightnings, and the people fell before Him in awe. Into their inmost souls had sounded those words—"I am the LORD your God: you shall have no other gods but Me." Every restraint—authority, fear, threatening, promise—held them back from the sin of idolatry. Yet all these restraints were broken, and at the very foot of Sinai they made the golden calf and worshipped it. This was the most outrageous in the black list of rebellions with which Israel provoked God. How vividly it lives in the memory of Moses, and how his soul is stirred with indignation as he recalls it, appears long years afterwards when he says—*"In Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry enough with you to have destroyed you."*

Moses and Aaron are the two characters in the chapter. The contrast between them is very striking. Side by side you have the might of the man who sees God, and lives in the consciousness of His Presence; and the helplessness of the man who stands alone. The whole story is a commentary on "Seeing Him who is invisible."

I. *The man who sees God is a hero.*

For forty days Moses and Joshua have been in the Mount of God. Aaron has been left in charge of Israel. To these people, timid and superstitious as they were, this prolonged absence would be full of terrible thought, and soon the lawlessness of the people began to show itself. This idolatry was doubtless but the height and climax of the turbulence of the people. Men do not suddenly reach such an extreme. Day after day the host grew more restless and riotous. The ringleaders see their opportunity and are quick to avail themselves of it. So at last came the terrible crisis. Moses was gone, they knew not where—up in that mountain, the home of the lightnings and thunder, it may well be that he has perished. Deserted and deceived, led up into a wilderness, mocked by promises of a goodly land *"flowing with milk and honey"*—they shall also perish here! They gather about Aaron with the demand—"Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." What shall Aaron do amid this clamouring host, with flashing eyes and furious voices, the blasphemous cry spreading on every side? They are ready to kill him if he opposes or seems to delay; a mob so mad has neither reason nor pity. A man who can stand against such a multitude, so excited, so determined, must be a man indeed. But, you ask, is not such heroism a matter of *nature*, of *character*, for which the man is not responsible so much as the race and family from which he comes, or the accident that determines our individuality? You say, no doubt, that Aaron was a man well qualified for some positions—and could indeed do well in his place, and better even than Moses; but he was not fitted for such a difficulty as this. I admit the difference of natural capacity, and the force of inherited qualities. Certainly Aaron never had the training of Moses: never had the call, and the commission. I would not blame the blind man for not painting; or the deaf man that he cannot make sweet music; or the timid man that he is no warrior. But suppose that, while this mob had surged about him, Aaron had *seen God, high and lifted up*. Suppose in his soul there had been the deep consciousness—*"You are God and there is none else."* Would

it not have made him strong, defiant, triumphant? *"The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits"* (Daniel 11:32). Look at the heroes whose stories are recorded in the Bible. They didn't get their heroism from nature, but by faith in God. GIDEON hesitates and pleads his feebleness, but this was his word from God:—*"Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"* MOSES himself shrank with an utter dread from the commission to lead Israel; and found his strength only in God's promise:—*"Certainly I will be with you."* Look at grand old LUTHER. Hadn't a flash of lightning frightened him out of the professor's chair into a monastery? But now he has learned that *"the just shall live by his faith,"* and he puts his foot down in defiance of pope and councils and devils. *"Here I stand. I can do no other—so help me God."* Overcoming faith is written about in Hebrews 11:—*"out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens"* (vs 34).

Look again at Aaron amid these hosts—weak, irresolute, afraid. Listen to him as with faltering voice he bids them bring him the golden earrings, the tokens of their great deliverance from Egypt. Swiftly they are brought and laid at his feet. Look at him as he gathers this glittering pile and makes ready to melt it and mould it, and fashion it in the image of a calf.

Now turn from all this to another scene. The people are in the wild intoxication of their mad revel. Then Moses comes down the mountain side and stands in the gate of the camp. One man—a *man of God*. Instantly a great burst of terror fell on all the people as they saw him, for in his presence they saw Another. That which a man habitually sees, others do come to see in him and through him. Then out upon that stillness rang the voice of Moses—*"Who is on the LORD's side?"* "The LORD's side"—that was the whole difference between these two men. To Aaron it was this rebel host against one man. To Moses it was this host against the LORD. *"Who is on the Lord's side?"* The sons of Levi instantly gathered round about him. Then as the trembling people listened, they heard the command—"Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" And the revelling of the idolaters gave place to the cries of the stricken and the host of the terrified. Such punishment alone, terrible as it was, could stay this madness of the people. And there died of the people about three thousand men.

Look at it again—the contrast between these two men. One man with God to help him is never in a minority and never can be. This is the might of Moses the man of God, and always the might of God's people—*seeing Him*. PETER, frightened Peter, is made a hero when he sees Him high and lifted up. He who sees God may walk the earth assured of victory: measuring duty and difficulty and every enterprise by the might of the Almighty. Oh, to live in this triumphant assurance—*"God is our Refuge and Strength: a very present Help!"*

II. *The man who sees God is the master of circumstances.*

Turn to this Aaron once more. Facing him, Moses cries indignantly, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" Mark where Moses lays the responsibility—"you have brought so great a sin upon them." And trembling Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

This calf came out! Poor helpless Aaron. "It was not my fault, you see, not at all. I really could not help it. You were gone, and stayed so long that they thought you never would come back again. And I—all I did was to fling their gold into the fire: and—and—there—came—out—this—calf."

Well, but after all, you say, aren't we the creatures of circumstance, if not indeed its slave. "Circumstance, that unspiritual god," as BYRON says, who can tell how largely we are shaped by grim necessity?

Let us admit the force of circumstances. Yet in this Book I hear of man as one who is crowned with honour and glory: made to have dominion. Then I find elsewhere thoughts of man as a bubble flung upon a wave, tossed hither and thither as winds may chance to blow. Which is the true estimate of life? Are we after all mere lumps of clay shaped by the hands of fate to honour or dishonour? Well, here is Aaron, the slave of circumstances. “All I did was to light a fire *and there came out this calf*. Blame the fire that was so perverse; blame the gold that took so ill a shape; but don’t blame me.”

But turn to Moses, this other man—*the man of God*. In his rage he digs a furnace. He kindles a fire. It is as if his very soul were in these tongues of flame that leap to heaven. And into the midst of the fiery furnace he flings the calf—the molten idol of the people. And lo! it came out a shapeless mass. And he ordered the men to break it in pieces. And others were set to grind it with stones until the thing was dust. And then he hauled it to the brook, and cast it into the bubbling stream, and turning in scorn to the people he told them to go and drink the god whom they had worshipped. Look at it. Out of one fire came that which made Israel sin; and out of the other came the destruction of Israel’s idol. So is the man of God: he is one who has dominion over circumstances. There are many things that he can’t control; but one thing he can do, and will: *No circumstances shall force him to sin: and no circumstances shall ever compel him to lead other people to sin*. It is a sight to look at—the man *who sees God*, and in the strength of that vision is master of circumstances. Servant of God, then fearing nothing. He can let his no be no, and his yes, yes. He need not explain, nor apologise. Oh, how great a gap there is between these two men—the slave of circumstances, and their master!

If ever man had a set of circumstances to deal with, incessant, threatening, overwhelming, that man was St. Paul. Yet listen to his boast. See how he stands and lets them come in all their swords about him. How he challenges the host and laughs his untroubled defiance. Tribulation, the giant thresher with the flail upon his shoulder; grim Famine, who would starve him into surrender; Persecution bares its dripping sword; Distress pots a thousand ills. But there beside his LORD, hand in with Him, he cries—“*In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*” (Romans 8:31-39).

III. *The man who sees God, sees all things rightly.*

Look again at these two men and compare their estimate of this deed. Aaron’s word seems to imply that he made very light of the matter. “Really,” he seems to say, “don’t get angry about a little thing like this. The people brought me their earrings and I cast them into the fire—and this calf came out. Surely it can’t matter whether the gold has one shape or another, a mere bit of gold—what harm is there in that?”

Ah, how easy it is to get rid of sin if only you can get rid of God. It is hard to know black from white when there is no light. Right and wrong do lose their very meaning apart from the authority of the Most High. *This calf came out*—that was all Aaron saw. But Moses sees that of which he can only speak again and again as “*a great sin.*” To him it was the heaping up of all that was blasphemous and insulting to the God of heaven. “*Thus they turned the glory of God into the image of an ox that eats grass.*” With all the foulness of the Egyptian idolatry, they celebrated the worship of this image which was to take the place of the Almighty. It’s only the man who lives in the light of God who can see the meaning of things. Only in the clear white light of God can a man see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the beauty of holiness. The man of God comes to see things as God sees them, and He sees them as they are.

IV. *The man who sees God is the true servant and deliverer of the people.*

“Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

The world often resents the presence of the man of God; they think him hard, narrow, unsympathetic. They think of him as a man to whom pleasure is a sin, and who wants to see the world made melancholy that it may be thought pious. But see how that it’s in the man of God that the most passionate devotion to the welfare of the people lives. Aaron lays the blame

upon them; but Moses intercedes for them, and would even take the penalty of their sin upon himself. Listen as in his love for the people he pleads—"Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." He is willing to his life for this people—his very existence; his hope of that future glory which was to be the recompense of reward for all that he had forsaken on earth.

How little the world knows, or perhaps the Church either, of the deliverances that are won for it by these men of God—men who rise up like the lightning conductors, drawing harmlessly to earth that which would have lingered into the destroying bolt. Who can tell how many averted judgments prayer has obtained. I would not for a moment darken or bedim the infinite love of God. His love, indeed, may have appointed these very deliverers; but I would magnify the power of intercessory prayer. See it in the case of LOT in Sodom, when the destroying angel cried, *"I cannot do anything until you arrive there."* What is it that surrounds this man as with an atmosphere of safety amid these perils? *"And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt."*

For our little round of life, as well as for such sublime work as Moses had to accomplish, this is the true condition—that we live as seeing Him who is invisible.

Aaron was *a religious man*—very religious, a man having to do with most solemn services, and to lead the worship of the people. True, a man may be very religious indeed, and yet he may not live seeing God; he may not carry with him the consciousness of God's Presence. Only *"he who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty"* (Ps.91:1).

Aaron was a religious man: but Moses was a man of God.

THE FAITHFUL MEDIATOR

"Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." —EXODUS 32:30.

THE great sin of Israel in worshipping the golden calf is not by any means to be lightly passed by. It is written "the LORD plagued the people"; and whatever the plague might have been the most terrible evil that could befall Israel was that which now hung over them, the threatened departure of the LORD from their midst. No plague can be so dreadful as when God says, "Let him alone: he is joined to his idols" (Hosea 4:17). Penalty and punishment tell of hope, but to be let alone is the beginning of the darkness of despair. Israel could go up to the land of Canaan, but to Moses the word had been spoken, "I will not go up in your midst." These tidings were brought to Israel by Moses. He would doubtless point out to them all that this threat involved. The people were already humble and awed by the sharp punishment which Moses had inflicted, and further by the plagues by which God had visited them. They are ready now to listen to his words. So it came to pass that all Israel bowed before God, and put off their ornaments in token of their mourning.

Then Moses gave the people a further opportunity of showing their repentance and of declaring their purpose of service. We read that he "took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass *that* everyone who sought the LORD went out to the tabernacle of meeting which *was* outside the camp." Whatever else it meant it was the token that God had withdrawn from the midst of Israel. He was afar off, and they who would find Him must go forth "outside the camp." At first sight it is somewhat perplexing to read of the tabernacle when as yet it was not in existence. The command to build the tabernacle had been given with all explicit and minute directions as to every part of it, the chosen wood and the gold over-laying it, and the enclosure of rich tapestries and the skins that were to protect it. And Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated for its service and arrayed in robes of beauty and glory, and the sacrifices were appointed in precise order. But as yet all these things had only been seen in the heavenly pattern, and the preparation had been delayed by the idolatry of Israel.

What, then, was the tabernacle which Moses set up for the worship of God, without any direction from heaven, and without any such decoration and distinction as that which had been commanded?

No doubt it pointed both backward and forward, and it may be regarded as the transition from the Patriarchal to the Levitical. As Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had pitched their tent and built their altar and then called upon the name of the LORD, so we may conclude that the altar of the LORD, at which the sacrifice was offered and where the people worshipped, was set up in the encampment of Israel. That altar would probably be close to the tent of Moses; and both for worship and for counsel the tent of Moses would come to be known as the tabernacle, "a tent of meeting," for that is the meaning of the word. But yet I think there is more in it than that. The vision of the tabernacle, in all its splendour, had been revealed to Moses —and the sight of the priest who was to minister to the LORD and to intercede for the people. And now Moses, urged by the need and sin of the people, thrust onward by his own great love and eagerness, cannot stay for the finished work; he dare not wait for the anointed priest in his ephod and with golden breastplate. He will pitch his own tent for the tabernacle. He will himself become the high priest of the people and intercede on their behalf. It was a daring thing, a presumption that was threatened and even punished with death on a later occasion. But this was the resistless eagerness of the soul that was ready to perish or to prevail for Israel. It was the daring of ESTHER, when for her people she ventured unbidden into the presence of the king, saying, *If I perish, I perish.*

The ceremony was one that the people understood. Doubtless they knew the peril that Moses had dared for their sakes. And as he passed without the camp all the people rose up, and every man stood in his tent door. What a hush falls upon the camp, what fears fill every soul as Moses goes on his way. And lo! as Moses entered into the tabernacle *“And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and THE LORD talked with Moses. All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door.”*

Love, true love, is never presumption. If the ways of wisdom are justified of her children, surely the ways of love are sanctified; and true love makes the ground holy whereon she sets her foot. We need meditate on this, for it is a sublime lesson and has much instruction for us. God, the God of Israel, is gone. They have sinned and grieved Him, and lo! He is withdrawn from their midst. Think what that Presence meant—*My Presence*. Without *that* how helpless were they, how lonely, how undone. Where could they find the very food they ate, the water they drank? That Presence was their shade by day and their safety by night. Who else could guide them through that trackless waste? And He was gone. *But one man is the means of communication*. One man keeps the intercourse open, bringing the wants and confession of the people up to God. One man pleads with great entreaty for the host, one man prevails and comes forth with forgiveness and deliverance for the host.

There is much in it that is mysterious. That cloud of the Divine Presence is intended to conceal a glory that was too great for a mortal gaze, while it does reveal God as accessible to mortal man and willing to commune with him. Why intercession is needful I cannot tell. Why the mediator should be there I don't know. But so what? Who of us can know what the righteousness of the Most High is? Who of us can know what claims must be satisfied before forgiveness can be spoken? Even with us erring creatures the majesty of the Law is humanity's greatness; the security of life and of property is the basis of civilization in every nation. The greatness of a nation is exactly in proportion as the righteousness of the Law is honoured and maintained. Who then shall measure the claims of God's holiness? If all were too hard for me to understand, I should doubt if these things come of God. I should doubt if they were intended for man. But here is at once enough for me to understand and enough for me to wonder at. I can understand enough to satisfy me, but I should be less than satisfied if I could understand it all. But midst the mysteries of intercession and mediation let's be sure of this, quite sure that in the heart of the Eternal Father there is no sleeping pity that needs to be quickened, no lingering purpose of love that must be stirred and moved by our entreaty. We not need cry aloud to Him in case He's sleeping. For ever and ever stands that great utterance of the LORD Jesus Christ; the most sublime truth that heaven ever spoke or earth ever heard—*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*. From that everlasting fountain of infinite love there comes unasked, unsought, the great gift of our salvation. And yet remains the mystery of intercession. The scene is the very A-B-C's of the Gospel; the dawn of that which was to grow with the ages until it reached the noontide glory. *“If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* Moses would fain have given himself a ransom for the people, and did indeed give himself in purpose and entreaty. But that which he could not accomplish, Someone greater than Moses has wrought for us. *“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”* (1 John 2:1, 2).

Linger over the sight of Moses - the link between Jehovah and Israel, bearing Israel's sins and sorrows into the Divine Presence, bringing grace and forgiveness into the midst of Israel. Listen to Moses as he pours out his heart in entreaty for the people. We, too, have a near Kinsman, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, who bears our sins and sorrows before the Almighty. We have a compassionate Saviour touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who loved us and gave Himself for us, and who is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him.

But linger over the scene again not only to see a blessed “type” of Christ, *but to find an example for ourselves*. This intercession is a work in which all God’s people are to find a place, and that the highest place they can find. Every need of our poor world, and every bit of love in our heart should urge us to the exercise of this gift. To take from me my power of intercession is to destroy that which is noblest and best in my nature. If a mother could not pray for her children wouldn’t motherhood lose more than half its sanctity and blessedness? If I can’t break through all forms and ceremonies, swept by the impulse of a great love for my brother, then my noblest life is chilled and choked and strangled. The heart must be able to leap with its longing to God, and after you’ve told Him of the needs and sorrows of others, to bring to them the assurance of His help and blessing. Every day, every hour, every moment, there are miracles of love and deliverance being done in our very midst by intercessory prayer; greater miracles than opened eyes and dead men raised. Holy influences come upon men and women – forces that melt hard hearts and bend stubborn wills and cast out devils. God is kept within reach of Israel by the influence of the man of prayer—we need to get the message of this power worked into us. Those human hands do keep the Almighty available. Joshua bids the sun stand still; but what might —to keep the very God of Heaven near! We honour men who put the forces of the world within our reach and make them available for us—water and steam and electricity. If we could see rightly, we would know that the really great men and women are those who keep the influences of God within reach of the world. The supreme greatness and glory of Jesus Christ is that: by Him, God comes within reach of us, and comes into our midst and dwells with us,—known, loved, rested in as our Father. First and best of all on earth are those who take earth’s sins and sorrows up to heaven, and bring down God’s grace and benediction. “*Behold,*” cried St. John, “*a door was opened in heaven.*” Every Christian man and every Christian woman is the opening of such a door, by which something of earth’s sorrow shall fly up to heaven, and something of heaven’s good shall assuredly flow down to earth. Ah! what a thing is this, to have such a possibility and power and not to use it—to be the door, and yet *to be shut*—to keep earth and heaven separate—to stop the intercourse. To us all are the following words spoken, “*Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in*” (Psalm 24:7, 9).

THE PRAYER OF MOSES AND ITS ANSWER

"Please show me Your glory." —EXODUS 33:18.

What was the glory Moses longed to behold?

NOTHING can be more vague and indefinite than this word "glory." Everything Divine must be glorious: the works of God are glorious; the purposes of God are glorious; every manifestation of God is full of His glory. Was this, then, the vague longing of the heart, like the vague longing of the little child for the rest and presence of the mother? This lonely man, a whole heaven above these murmuring slaves about him, must often have turned panting for God as *"the hart panteth after the water brooks."* And it might be especially so right now, when he was oppressed by the mad folly and wickedness of this people,— as they were blind to all the great purposes of God, forgetful of all their splendid past, so lightly turning from the sublime revelations of Jehovah to the most foul and abominable idolatry. Sick at heart, filled with despair, wearied and oppressed, well might Moses long with all his soul for the vision of God's glory. But as we turn to the incident out of which this entreaty comes, we shall see clearly what it was that Moses longed to behold.

Show me Your glory. No man had ever seen the glory of God as Moses had seen it. He had beheld the glory of the Creator. Day after day it had been set before him in successive visions. The majesty of the Maker of heaven and earth spread before him in exceeding glory. He had seen the glory of the Most High as the Deliverer of His people. In the plagues which overthrew the power of Pharaoh what might and majesty was there! And never had earth beheld a more sublime manifestation of glory than when Israel, hemmed in on every side by perils and pursued by the horsemen of Pharaoh, marched triumphantly across the sea. Well might they sing, *"Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"* And Moses had seen, as none else had seen, the glory of the Lawgiver. God had spoken to him as a man speaks to a friend, and had given him the words by which henceforth His people were to live. Yet beyond this threefold glory there was another for which the soul of Moses longed. What was it?

The incident itself will afford us the clue. He had come down from the Mount of God with the majesty of the revelation resting upon him, and with the words of the Most High still sounding within him, when suddenly as he turned on some rocky winding of the mountain path there burst upon him the shout of the people—wild songs, the accompaniment of lascivious dances and foul idolatries. Then he reached some further point from which in that clear air he saw the hosts gathered about the golden calf, and there rang the shout, "These are you gods, O Israel." Instantly the soul of Moses was kindled to a white heat of indignation. Hurling the tablets of Law to the ground, he ran to the gate of the camp, and shouted that all who were on the LORD's side should gather about him. Then rushing amongst the naked idolaters, he and his followers struck them right and left, until three thousand men lay dead upon the desert sand, and the rest of the guilty host fled terrified from his presence. Look at the man. Anger! Jealousy for God! Fiery indignation so filled him that he could but smite, as incapable of pity as if there were no room for patience, no possibility of forgiveness.

But look again at this great leader of the people. See him as he turns from them to God. See how he takes this people's sin upon himself, as if it were his own, feeling the curse and shame of it as they never could. Listen how he pleads on their behalf. His soul is all entreaty. All his heart yearns over them. He is ready to cast himself between them and the sword of justice. He is ready to die for them—and infinitely more than die. "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold. Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of the Book of Life." Such is the man, so eager for his people that for their sakes he will give up all the great recompense of the reward for which he had left all the splendour and wealth of Egypt.

The prayer of Moses prevails. The Presence of God is restored to Israel. And as the gracious assurance is given, Moses prays “*PLEASE, show me Your glory.*” What glory could it be save that which could reconcile these diverse feelings that had filled his own soul? As if he cried, “Shew me, O God, how You can be just and yet be love—indignation against sin must burn in You as a consuming fire. What is this faint anger of mine compared to Your abhorrence of such evil: and yet in You is pity that pleads and delivers. . . . O God, show me this glory of a righteous love: the glory of a holiness that is unsoiled and yet forgives.” This was the conflict in the heart of Moses. If this were no conflict in the heart of God, what was the mystery and glory of their reconciliation? That, whatever it was, was the supreme glory of God. So is begotten within the man this cry, “*PLEASE, show me Your glory.*”

And now let us turn to the answer that God gave to Moses’ prayer. He is directed to come up early in the morning and to present himself to the LORD on the top of the mountain. And there hidden within the clefts of the rock he is to be in darkness while God passed by. Then came a voice proclaiming, “*The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation*” (Num.14:18). And as Moses heard the voice he ran and bowed his head to the ground and worshipped, satisfied; and he takes from his heart that which was dearer than his own life, and sets it in the keeping of this God of love. “*O LORD, pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.*”

There is much in the scene that is mysterious. How indeed could it be otherwise in such a revelation of the Most High? But much is clearly revealed for our instruction. There is that which we cannot know in God. We can’t know the holiness of God. If the soul of man is stirred to indignation as Moses was stirred by the sight of Israel’s idolatry, who can ever tell what our sin means in God’s sight! If once we looked upon the undimmed glory of the Sun of Righteousness we would be for ever overwhelmed: the eyes of hope would be smitten and sealed in despair. But all His goodness can pass before us, and we can hear His voice proclaiming, “*The LORD, merciful and gracious.*” So comes again the question, How can holiness and love be one? There is, there can be, but one answer—the answer of God Himself in the vision of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man. From that mountain height, Moses saw the day of Christ and was glad (John 8:6). He who long afterwards appeared on the mount of the transfiguration talking with the Saviour of the death that He should accomplish at Jerusalem, had looked on and seen into this mystery. It is this supreme glory of God which St. Paul sets forth with such adoring joy: “*Whom God set forth as a propitiation (a mercy seat) by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins . . . that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*” It is only hidden in the Rock of Ages that I can look forth upon the satisfying vision. In God I see a holiness which is my despair—how can I find in Him a love that can forgive and bless?—pardon at the expense of righteousness cannot be the ground of my faith; it gives away too much—pardon loses the very pledge of its security unless it is rooted and grounded in righteousness. But in the Cross of Christ, righteousness and love have met and triumphed in forgiveness. That is the glory, the supreme glory of God. “*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*” (2 Cor.9:15).

The incident has yet two other lessons which we should learn. This is the demand and craving of the earth, “Show us Your glory.” The impatient Church wants that which should dazzle and compel. It is the cheap and easy and superficial way to victory That was the temptation which met the Messiah as He set out on His work. “Show your divine power: command that these stones be made bread; then who won’t follow You?” Bedazzle and bewilder men by the manifestations of Your glory. Cast Yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and let men see You land uninjured on the ground. (Matt. 4; Luke 4). This is the craving of the heart—splendour, majesty, glory. But the answer of heaven is ever and always

this, “*The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth.*” This is the great lesson that Elijah has to learn. He would have chosen the thunderbolt, the earthquake, and fire for the rebellious people and for the idolatrous Jezebel; but he had to learn that God is not in these, but in the small voice—*this* must subdue the world.

Thus, the coming of Christ cut across the expectation of Israel. They looked for a King of kings and LORD of lords, who should execute vengeance upon their enemies; who should be proclaimed by all the signs of heaven and all the wonders of the Almighty. But lo! this is the sign of which the angels sing, “*You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*” We need to be constantly reminded of it. We often long for some great token of the Divine Presence, some overwhelming revelation to our own soul, or some mighty manifestation. No, that is not God’s plan. If we will go up to the Mount, up from the dust and mists of earth, and wait before God, we shall hear the voice proclaiming, “*The LORD God, merciful and gracious.*” This is the truth we all must learn, that love is glory: kindness, pity—patient and helpful pity—this is the Almighty power which is to uplift the world. Within our own hearts this is the proof given us of our own salvation, that we love our brothers. This is strength and this is victory, to be merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth. Take it and rest in it, that love is genius, and love is philosophy, and love is power—for God is love.

Not less important is the second great lesson of our subject: That the supreme good of our life is that we should *know God*. We see how this incident has prepared Moses for this further revelation of God. Every man’s conception of God is the best that is in him, the loftiest of which he is capable. Now the supreme purpose of God is that in all the events of every day we should grow in the knowledge of Himself. See how life is adapted to this purpose in the relationship of father and mother, the very helplessness and dependence are to develop trust and obedience and love, which when thus developed are to be extended to the Father in heaven. The meaning of all life is wrapped up in this; its mercies, its mysteries, its duties, its sorrows, its pleasures, its relationships—social, political, commercial—are all to teach us of Him. In a remarkable sermon of BEECHER I find these words: “I can bear witness to this, that not all the books, and not all the influences beside, have ever done so much for me as the attempt to find in my conception of God that which should do good to some fellow being. In the presence of men who were enquiring, in the presence of men who were fettered hand and foot, in the presence of men who were bewildered, or depraved, or embittered, to find such a conception as would bring the light and power of the divine nature into their souls, has been the instruction that has lifted me into nobler and grander, and I think truer conceptions of the divine nature than books have recorded, or than could otherwise have been framed.”

Thus love, true deep, tender love to others is the secret that reveals the knowledge of God. It’s so true that, He who loves knows God, for God is love (see 1 John 4:8).

FROM SINAI TO THE WATERS OF MERIBAH

NUMBERS 10:3 to 20:13.

THE great purpose in Sinai has been completed. The Law has been given, and the ritual of Jewish worship has been revealed by God and set up, so far as their wandering life permitted, with a solemnity which must have greatly impressed these hosts. Aaron moved among them in his robes of beauty and glory. In their midst stood the tabernacle of the LORD, with its manifestation of the Divine Presence. The smoke of the sacrifice rose every day. The Israelis were given many new indications that they were the people of God, called with a high and holy calling as His witnesses among the nations of the earth. Now that all this has been accomplished they set forth on their journey towards Canaan. Moses may well have expected that with a settled law, and with such an ordered service there would be no further delay; that they could march on day by day to possess the goodly land. How great, how bitter his disappointment was is shown in these chapters.

It was not long before the rough rebellious spirit of the multitude showed itself again. Wearied at the journey, its monotony and apparent hopelessness, the angry murmurings of the people rose once more. It commenced with the mixed multitude—many Egyptians, frightened by the plagues and tempted by the glowing expectations of Israel, had gone *with* them, but they were never *of* them. It may be that the more gorgeous ritual and the more manifest superiority of Israel had made a deeper distinction between these camp-followers and the people of God, and left them the more ready for revolt. In punishment, the lightning of God fell and set fire to their tents - a peril that must have threatened the whole encampment. The fire was quenched, but the murmuring spirit survived the deliverance, and these lawless stragglers, vexed at the thought of having left Egypt for the wilderness, and still more at having joined themselves to a people whose fortunes they could but lightly share but whose misfortunes they were constantly to endure, cried out against the food thus provided and lusted for the rich luxuries of Egypt. The soul of Moses is tried beyond endurance, and he prays that he may die, wearied and burdened by the incessant grumbings. *"I am not able to bear all these people alone,"* he cries in his misery, *"because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!"*

In compassion for his weariness God gave him seventy men—called them out and directed them to stand about the tabernacle, and sent His Spirit upon them so that they prophesied. And these were to stand with Moses and between him and the people. But as for the murmurers, they greedily ate the quails that came along their way, so that a plague broke out among them and many died.

Then an even worse trial came upon the great leader of God's host. it was bad enough to hear it from the lips of the mixed multitude, a thing that Moses resented and God severely punished. But now those of his own household are to be his foes. His wife Zipporah was dead, and Moses had taken another woman as his wife who is referred to as an "Ethiopian" or Cushite woman. Miriam took it upon herself to make that the ground of a revolt against Moses. The elder sister, to whom Moses had long ago owed a great debt of gratitude, a woman partaking of the family gifts as well as the family honour, it was hard for her to have to take second place to this "Ethiopian stranger," and she angrily resents it. To some extent, Aaron sides with her; at any rate he allows her to speak in his name. "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses. . . . And they said, Has the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Has He not spoken also by us?" It struck not only at the authority of Moses but at the authority of God. What hope was there for Israel's obedience and submission, if Miriam and Aaron were to proclaim themselves the leaders of Israel, and claim to speak to the people in the name of the LORD? All order was at an end; all authority was gone. Strife and faction would reign

everywhere, and, split into rival hosts, the people would separate and perhaps turn against each other.

No more painful trial could have come to the heart of this meekest of men at this point. He had shrunk from the high position he occupied until his unwillingness almost amounted to disobedience. He had given up all honour and high position for the welfare of his household and brethren. Never in this world was there a man who had sought less to assert himself or to gain his own ends. Never did any great leader endure more hardships, or have a more difficult post to fill. Miriam and Aaron had been given positions of influence and power quite as great as they were fitted for. It has been suggested that the recent promotion of Aaron to the priesthood had already begotten something of that arrogance and haughty intolerance which seem inseparable from the priesthood, but in this case at any rate there is more of a woman's jealousy than a priest's bigotry.

The meekness of Moses show itself in the silence with which he meets the charge. But God takes up his cause and avenges it; the curse of leprosy falls upon Miriam—she became white as snow. And although she is restored, in answer to the intercession of Moses, yet she is shut out from the camp for a week as one defiled, and it may be that she bore upon her the marks of that terrible visitation until her dying day.

Yet, bitter as it was, even all this is less bitter than the further trial which awaits Moses. The children of Israel have now reached the border of the Holy Land. It is fifteen months since they quitted Egypt, and now they are within sight of the mountains—(see Deut. 1:20, 21). But the hearts of the people shrank from entering the land of whose inhabitants they had heard so much; and they begged Moses to send out spies who would bring them the report of the land. Twelve men were sent; and they came back bearing the tidings that the land was good *but*—ah, it was a great black hopeless *but* in the ears of Israel—the cities were walled up to heaven, and the men were sons of Anak, and Israel would have no chance of overcoming them. In vain did Caleb and Joshua, two of the spies, declare that they were able to possess it. In vain they told of the goodly land and of the grapes that grew in it. A great despair seized the hearts of the people. They had left all and lost all. Deceived after such a journey and so many hardships; led on by such brilliant expectations; dreading lest the enemy should sweep down upon them and slay them with their wives and little ones, weeping and furious they broke into a fierce revolt. *“Let us select a leader and return to Egypt,”* was the cry that burst from the lips of the people. In vain did Joshua and Caleb seek to still the people and tell them of the goodly land. The angry cry arose that they should be stoned. Then the glory of the LORD flashed upon the people, and His voice was heard, *“How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them . . . and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”* Instantly Moses is full of pity for the rebellious people, and falls before God in eager intercession. He pleads the promise that had been spoken in the Mount, *“Let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, ‘The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression.’ . . . Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”*

Once more the prayer is heard and the people are spared. But of all that generation none are allowed to see the goodly land except Caleb and Joshua. *“But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years. . . . According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years.”*

As soon as the people heard the decision, in their madness *“they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, ‘Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised.’”* In vain Moses entreated them—*“Do not go up, the LORD will not be with you. . . . But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the camp.”* ⁴⁵ Then the

Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah."

What an utterly unmeaning and stupid thing is this unbelief! Surely if God could bring them out of Egypt He could bring them into Canaan. If Jehovah could deliver Pharaoh and his host into their hands with such splendid triumph, who were these Amalekites that they should fear them?

But what an unutterable grief this penalty must have been to Moses. They were to wander for another forty years, when he had seemed so near the end of his great life-work, and when the rest for which he longed so greatly was within reach. The months since he had left Egypt had been a continual grief and weariness, and now he is to go on the same dreary round for forty years more! Are we ready to complain that such sacrifice and such nobility should be so scantily rewarded? Well, the reward depends upon what Moses reckoned life's best. If the reward were in wealth or greatness, then he had left behind him more than he could find elsewhere; if it were in ease and indulgence, then he should have tarried in the palace of Egypt. If this were the reward, he found a poor return for his service. But we must look elsewhere for his recompense. We can only understand the man and the history aright when we remember how he had been lifted up to find his satisfaction and his joy in God. Think of him wearied, yet think of him of whom it was spoken, "My Presence shall go with you and I will give you rest." Think of him vexed by the miserable murmurings of this host, a set of slaves with scarce soul enough to be saved, yet remember the other side of it all—how that all God's goodness was made to pass before him, and there were given him such visions of the glory of God as none else ever had.

Once more they set out on their journey, a dreary, weary wandering. The foolish encounter with the Amalekites had destroyed the dread of Israel which had fallen upon all people, and doubtless exposed them to frequent attacks. The days were for the most part dull and monotonous, almost without incident, mournfully waiting for a generation to die. Then it is that Korah, a Levite and a cousin of Aaron, stirs up the tribe of Reuben to revolt. Reuben was the firstborn and should have the ruler-ship, and he himself should be the priest. This rebellion is punished by the sudden death of the leaders. But the people seem to rush to their own destruction. The next day all Israel murmured against Moses, clamouring that he had slain the people of the LORD. Then a plague came upon them which threatened to destroy them all, but Moses intercedes once more, and the plague is stayed. Meanwhile, it is evident that there is a brighter side of these years of wanderings. A new race is growing up that had never been in Egypt, had never been degraded by its idolatry and its bondage; a nation hardier and of a braver spirit.

As the forty years draw to a close, the encampment is at Kadesh Barnea once more - near to the land of Canaan. And here Miriam died. It was the first break in that family which had done such great things for Israel. They mourned for her thirty days.

Then came an incident which had much to do with the career of Moses and Aaron. Once again the water had failed, and the host murmured against Moses and Aaron, that they had brought them up into the wilderness to kill them. At once Moses laid the matter before the LORD. He was directed to take the rod and gather the assembly together; and he with Aaron should speak to the rock before their eyes, and it would pour forth water. But instead of an exact obedience, by which God should have been sanctified in their eyes, Moses was vexed and angry with the people. Instead of speaking to the rock in the name of God he spoke unadvisedly to the people. We can't wonder. It's not for us to blame him who are so much below him. But evidently he forgets both God and the commandment. Turning upon the people he dries, "Hear now, you rebels, must *we* fetch you water out of this rock?" And then turning in his anger to the rock he smote it with the rod instead of speaking to it only. Moses, eminent and zealous as he has been for the LORD of hosts, is not to be spared for such an offence. "*Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.*" And Aaron was to share in the penalty. "*Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not*

enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah."

Now as the story stands we must all feel that the penalty was out of all proportion to the offence; that considering the provocation which Moses had endured from these people, and considering the noble endurance and sacrifice which he had made for them, it was an utterly cruel thing to shut him out of Canaan for a hasty word. Every instinct tells us that there must be more to the story. The charge against Moses was that "*you did not believe Me.*" To Moses, an old man, no thought was so dear as that he should see the great purpose of his life fulfilled, for which he had surrendered everything. At this very place the wicked murmuring of the people had driven them back for forty years. Now that weary time is almost done. At last he may hope, at last he may breathe. He moves amongst the people eager to check the first complaint: eager to stimulate their faith and hope. If they are turned back again he can never hope to set foot in Canaan, he must perish like the rest in the wilderness. Alas, the water supply is failing them. Will the people have faith in God? No, the murmuring spreads, and now the people gather furious and clamouring. Then his heart sinks within him. It is all of no use. This generation is no better than the last. These are rebels as their fathers were. They, too, will faint at the sight of the cities walled up to heaven, and at the verge of Canaan will again provoke God. Miserable rebels, why should he care what becomes of them? Why should he be wearied and vexed about them, if this is their spirit? Such is the meaning of the words "*You rebels,*" must we get water out of this rock for *you*?—such a miserable set of ingrates as you are! He was worn out, indignant. Water was too good for such as they were. He grudged it, and almost resented their having it. Good water was wasted upon such a group. And in his rage he lifted up the rod and struck the stone. It was a sin, a great sin, to be punished in the eyes of all Israel.

As we set the offence beside the penalty there are two things to be remembered. Nothing could teach Israel so solemn and impressive a lesson in obedience as this—Aaron's death—that no position, no solemnity of office could lessen the penalty of disobedience; and that even Moses the man of God must suffer. How solemn, how terrible a thing was the commandment of the Most High! And notice the effect of this penalty—that this accomplished what plagues and punishments had failed to do—"*The murmurings of Israel ceased at the waters of Meribah.*" Does it seem hard to us that Moses should be punished sharply so that Israel might be cured of grumbling? Well, in the life which is to come, when all is made plain, won't it heighten and brighten the recompense of the reward, that the penalty which Moses endured wrought for Israel so great a good? Isn't that high service?

And remember again that the exclusion of Moses from Canaan was not only a penalty: it was the completion of the "type". Moses could not bring the people in. He is the "type" of the Law. They must wait for Joshua (a "type" of Jesus) to lead the people into the goodly land. Isn't it a joy, a compensation so to belong to God that He can use us thus for the fulfilling of the great purposes? This, too, assuredly shall in no wise lose its reward.

THE SERPENTS IN THE WILDERNESS

“And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it on a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived.” —NUMBERS 21:9.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” —ST. JOHN 3:14, 15.

IT is very instructive to notice the New Testament use of the Old Testament record of Moses. His history and its incidents are constantly referred to as illustrations and “types” of Christ. Again and again St. Paul finds his illustrations in the life of Moses, and much more than illustrations. It is not just curious fancy that his sturdy logic finds the materials for two compact arguments in these chapters. The manna, the rock, the veil on the face of Moses, are all immediately connected with Jesus Christ. Also in the Book of Revelation, St. John constantly finds imagery in the life of Moses, by which he sets forth the things which are to come. And the Church in all ages has found a very Pilgrim’s Progress in Egypt and the wilderness journey to the goodly land. No “type” is more familiar, no illustration more constant. The arrangements of Jewish worship are full of predictions of Christ—living pictures of our salvation. The LORD Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins—the Lamb of God which bears away the sins of the world. He is the Mercy-seat, as the word “propitiation” is rendered in the marginal reference. He is the High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us, and who is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him.

So we see that the unity of the Scriptures is in Jesus Christ. We do not see Him rightly until we see Him as the subject of all Scripture, the object of all history, the source and completion of all nature.

Of all the references to our LORD, which are taken from the life of Moses, nothing is so stirring as the words of the LORD Jesus Himself, when He finds in this incident the image of His own great salvation.

Let us set before ourselves the two scenes—Israel is still journeying through the wilderness. To punish them for their murmuring and departure from God they are visited by a plague of serpents, spreading a terrible panic amongst the people. They spring with deadly coil from the sand. They lurk unsuspected in the stunted shrubs. They hide in the crevices of the rock. They creep within the folds of the tent. There is a shriek, and neighbours hurry to find one within gasping, fallen, dead! Now a strong man writhes in anguish and is stretched a corpse. The dreadful hiss is heard and a mother snatches her child. Alas, too late! She presses the dead body to her breast. They multiply till no life is safe, no place is free. The calm night is rent by the cries of the victims and the mournings for the slain. Hundreds are dead on the way. Households are dead at dawn. Then the people come to Moses, saying, “We have sinned; pray to the LORD for us.” Like a faithful High Priest bearing the guilt of the people Moses passed into the Divine Presence, and prayed for their deliverance; then God directs him to take a serpent of brass, and set it up on a pole; and whoever looked at it should live. With the cry of the perishing urging him to haste, Moses shaped the serpent and set it up glistening in the desert sun. “And so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” Such is the one scene.

The other scene is in the quiet of the night where Jesus sat talking with Nicodemus. Recalling this incident of Israel he found in it a “type” and prophecy of Himself. *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”* The words are spoken as He stands on the threshold of His work. Think how vividly that dread purpose of His coming must ever have risen before Him. Think how all that pointed to the Cross met Him constantly as He read the

Scripture. As He walked in the temple, how every altar proclaimed His agony: the lamb, the dove, the bullock, the very bread He ate were emblems of the death He must die. Yet with what a calm fearlessness He speaks it. With what a steady courage and unfaltering purpose He faces it. Think of that never-halting love; of that never-failing strength. Think of the courage that was never turned aside. Never hastening, never hindered, He came on His way with a sublime heroism. Let us rest and exult in the great Captain of our salvation, who could look onward so calmly to the end: *“Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”* Putting the two scenes together we have a *disturbing picture of sin*; and a *blessed picture of salvation*.

I. *Here is a picture of sin.* Upon the still air of the wilderness there rings a cry. The people, roused from their noontide rest, run together. Here lies one writing in the dust. What ails him? There is no wound from which the life is oozing. There are no broken limbs, no sign of any blow. “Bring him forth from the tent,” saith one, “it is the heat.” “Set him in the shade,” said another. “It is the sun,” said a third, “stand back and let him have the air.” “He is faint and overdone,” said another, “give him food.” But deeper than their eyes can see lies the mischief. As if the heart had turned traitor to the man, it hurries the poison through his veins and sends it throughout the system. It creeps into the brain and leaves it darkling; it goes along the limbs and leaves them powerless. Then his struggles cease, the man groans and dies. The mischief is *within* him. We talk of condition, temptation, surroundings, but deeper than these is the poison of sin. It is *within* us—*within* us; an accursed poison in the soul. It paralyses the will and leaves us indifferent and dead to God. It creeps into the mind and darkens it to God. Circumstances may aggravate the poison within, but circumstances are neither the cause nor the cure of the mischief. It is deeper than any influences with which we can reach it, and more than any surroundings can undo. *The poison is within.*

And now comes a simple man and ventures to suggest that it is a serpent’s bite. If the people of those times were as clever as the clever people of today, think of the derision with which it is greeted. “A horrible delusion—an utter superstition. A notion fit for those dark ages before we were born! Look at MAN, sir. Do you not know that he is the very top and crown of all creation? See him with his lofty intellect, his kingly will, his majestic bearing, set as one having dominion over the kingdoms of the earth! Do you mean to say that a little contemptible reptile, a thing that creeps in the dust, can touch him, and destroy him with such a swift and fatal mystery? Nonsense, sir—it is most unphilosophical.” But listen, what is that cry? Run swiftly. Draw back the curtain of his tent. See! there creeps the serpent, and there lies the philosopher, dead! *Dead!* Dead, with all his kingly intellect and lofty words. It was awfully real. Ah! that’s how people talk about sin—it’s an article of some ancient creed—a lingering superstition of the priests—a mistake of our training. Would to God it were! Don’t we know, haven’t we felt, this accursed mischief within us? The good that we want to do, we don’t practice; the evil that we hate, we do. Some people say that sin is a delusion, a notion, a foolish fancy! Why, I could take you into hundreds of homes this very night where staggers the drunken man; the drunken woman; and into homes where wretched, white-faced, ragged children cower terrified. Go and ask the outcast who is loathing life; go and ask the drunkard as he grinds his teeth and curses that which is dragging him down to hell, body, soul, and spirit. Do you object that I have taken such extreme cases? Where did the extreme cases begin? What made these extreme and exceptional cases, if sin is not a hideously real thing? And turn to the noblest, the purest, the best you have ever read of. Do not their confessions, their prayers, their struggles tell us the same thing? *Sin is real*, horribly, awfully, accursedly real. As the man who has tried to break its fetters, and cast off its tyranny. *Sin is real.*

Look again—*The bite was fatal.* Many people died. It was not light affliction, which was but for a moment, a passing inconvenience that wore away with time; it was not a sickness from which, with prudence and care, they could recover. Not as when Paul shook off his venomous beast into the crackling flames, and it perished there. He who was bitten *died*; old and young, strong man and frail woman. “Ah,” say those who are always ready to make light of any illness unless it is their own, “he’ll get over it; he is young, and his age is on his side.” “Ah,” says another, “look what a splendid constitution he has, he will mend.” “Ah,” says

another, “we must hope for the best.” *But many people died.* It is the awful picture of sin. It can have only one ending—death—death—death. “*The soul who sins shall die,*” rings the warning of God (Ezekiel 18:4). How foolishly we talk of it. When it is a child, we say, “He is young and will grow better.” When it is a youth, we say, “Let him sow his wild oats, and he will settle down.” Ah, what cruel folly! *What a man sows that shall he also reap.* When it is middle age, we say, “Yes, it is very sad, but he has a great many good points, you know.” Well, we must hope for the best.” And in upon this Babel there comes the terrible note of doom: *The wages of sin is death, death, death.* Those two are ever joined together, and joined together by God, no one can separate them. There is only one power that can ever sever these two, and that is the Cross of Jesus Christ. My brother, hold up the lamp of God, and let shine onto the path in which you are going, and look on at the end of it. What voices are those that sound from heaven, how tender and entreating, how loud and commanding, bidding us flee from the wrath to come. What voices are these that sound from another world, weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!

The lips of Jesus Christ the blessed Brother and Saviour of men, He who came not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved, said “*Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched*” (Mark 9:44). Figurative? Certainly, but what underlies the figure? What does it shape and set forth? I know not—God grant we never may! But it is the figure which sets forth the end and doom of sin. If sin is a light thing to be excused and laughed away, what is the meaning of that Cross? Why, then, *must* the Son of Man be lifted up? There, in that shame and curse and agony, I see sin as I can see it nowhere else. Sin is deadly and fatal—sin has only one ending, and that ending is the awful mystery of hell.

II. *We have a blessed picture of salvation.* “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so is the Son of Man lifted up: that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” Notice first, *that the remedy came from God.* If they were as enlightened as men are in our times, the people did not die for lack of advisers and opinions. And doubtless they would try all their own remedies before they turned to the LORD. Probably none would be so busy as *the charmers*—among them would be some who knew the secrets of the Egyptian snake-charmers. The professional charmer may have been in the mixed multitude,” boasting descent which could not fail in its authority, assuring their remedies. There is the music that can charm the serpent, and destroy the poison. There is the mystic sign set around the place that made it sacred. There are mysterious magic amulets to be worn for safety; this on the neck, and this about the wrist. There is a ceremony that shall hold the serpent spell-bound and powerless. But come here. Lift up this curtain. See here one lies on the ground. “He sleeps.” No indeed, he will never wake again. Why, it’s the charmer! Here are the spells and the charms and the mystic signs all about him. And lo! there glides the serpent, the charmer himself is dead.

Many are busy still with their charms—church services, softened feelings, muttered prayers. No! No! They avail nothing. Religious forms, ceremonies, creeds, are empty and useless if they stop short of the Cross of Christ. “Even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up.” In Him and Him alone is salvation. “*Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*”

Others doubtless urged more severe measures. Cut deep into the wounded part, burn out the poison. And still *many people died.* Ah! the agony and strife, the bitter shame, the keen cutting of remorse, the misery and anguish with which we may have striven for deliverance. But in vain—all in vain. Aren’t we tired of the mummeries of the charmers—priests and preachers, creeds and theories, isn’t it time to seek a true remedy? The agony and anguish of our own efforts, the misery of our own failures—can’t we find some better way than this?

Moses prayed and there came an answer. Immediately he ordered the workmen to make a serpent of brass, and eagerly set it up onto the lofty staff. And then the heralds went throughout the camp with the tidings—God hath given us a remedy! “*Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man,*

when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived" (Numbers 21:9). Blessed be God that He has devised a way of salvation. We want no other. Against Him I have sinned; with Him alone I have to do; and what He has provided I can assuredly accept.

Ah! what a sight it was. Haggard eyes and faces pale in death turned to the glistening sign, and at once the fever ceased, the sufferer lived. Here and there eager groups came, bringing some dying person to look. Gasping he reaches the top of the hill. The vision bursts upon him. He lives! He lives! "*When he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*" "*Whosoever believeth in Him hath everlasting life.*"

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BEFORE we enter upon this story of Balaam it may be well for us to see what the Scriptures say of him elsewhere. He stands upon the heights of Moab, a warning to all the ages - and to none more than this money-loving nineteenth century. Peter points back to this strange figure—*“...enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet”* (2 Peter 2:14-16). And Jude denounces those who *“have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit.”* John, the son of thunder, mentions him, *“You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality”* (Revelation 2:14).

As we read these chapters in the life of Moses, Balaam is not set before us in such dark colours. He was a man really great in many respects; of splendid gifts; in whom the spark of divine fire was fanned by a breath into a flame of loftiest poetry. A seer gifted with that vision of things in the light of God which made him a true prophet; and with the power of uttering that which he saw such as was rivalled only by Isaiah or Moses. And not only a great man, at some time he assuredly was a good man. He could not have been so bad if he had not been so good, for there is a religious conviction and conduct which go to the making of the worst man, as in the case of the Pharisee in every age. We think of this man as being an honest and sincere seeker after God, another Abraham, who listened and heard the voice of God and came to be a faithful witness. Then he began to use his gifts and privileges for his own advancement. There came the lust of power; the lust of position; the lust of gain; and Balaam the prophet and seer of God goes out into the darkness like Judas; almost indeed like another Lucifer, son of the morning, falling headlong from his height, until he creeps a hissing serpent, eating the dust and breathing poison.

The wanderings of Israel have brought them to the eastern corner of Palestine, where dwelt the people of Moab. As the descendants of Lot, and thus connected with Abraham, they are not to share the fate of the Canaanite. But Balak, the king of Moab, having heard of their victories over the other nations, is filled with fear at their coming. He calls the elders together. *“This people,”* says he, *“will lick us up as an ox licks up the grass of the field. To fight against them will avail us nothing.”* Then he reminds them of the famous soothsayer whose name and fame have spread throughout the lands. They will send to him, and it may be that he shall come and curse this people, and thus shall they be delivered. So the messengers are sent, and appear before Balaam with their entreaty, fully persuaded of the power of this man. *“Please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”* If there were any ambition in this man, any love of power, such a request would be sure to find it out. To be summoned by the king for nothing less than the deliverance of the whole nation, to be recognised as possessed of such mysterious power, it was as of his were the voice of a god. Balaam bids the messengers tarry for the night, while he enquires of the LORD in this matter. The will of God was plainly declared: *“You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.”*

In the morning Balaam met the messengers with the reply, *“Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you.”* We feel in the words an angry acceptance of the Divine will. He wanted to go. There is no word about the people whom God has blest. Not thus was the prophet of God wont to speak. Think how such a one as Elijah

would have thundered it, "As the LORD lives before whom I stand, I will not go with you, nor will I in any way curse them whom He hath blessed." An unwilling and reluctant "no" is sometimes the surest way of saying "yes." It only stimulates the more determined attack. That message is certain not to close the communication. So Balak sends a larger company of more distinguished men, with costlier presents and splendid promises. The highest position should be his. Balaam comes forth to meet them and hears their words. He has his answer, and always speaks piously. "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more." A noble answer, if it had ended there. As it was it was too religious. We suspect the kind of man who mouths his pious phrases about everything; who uses his religion as a tread-mark, and quotes Scripture in the prospectus of the company that he promotes. God had spoken to Balaam. God had told him that he should not go, that he should in no wise curse this people. But Balaam bids the company of princes with their splendid presents *wait till the morrow*, while he shall see *what more the LORD shall say to him*. There is the man—These pious phrases are but the white robes and phylacteries of the Pharisee. All the soul of the man longed for the told, and thirsted for the position, and cried aloud for the honours. And now this Balaam thinks he can argue God into changing His mind; as if God were such a one as himself, and as if the mind of God were not the everlasting truth, the utterly unchangeable right. So this man trifles with his own conscience, and then trifles with God.

The LORD Jesus has given us a precept which if acted on would save the world half its troubles. "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." It is the mixture of yes *and* no that slays men. Truth with this Balaam is not a thing rooted as the rocks, firm as the mountains, everlasting as God; but it is a thing that can be trimmed; one thing today, another to-morrow, according to who may come, or what they may bring. Balaam will find some way of securing all this gold and this proud position, yet without saying anything other than the message of God. Men of this sort today pride themselves that they do not tell lies with their lips, but the lie is through and through them. We hear this Balaam assuring himself as to how much good he could do with the money; and of course he would speak no word but that which God spoke by him. As if ill-gotten gain is not always of the devil; he keeps the account of it with grim exactness, demanding the uttermost farthing. So begins the strife with God. And it ends as these methods always do, *He may go*. God speaks and speaks plainly; but if His voice be not heeded, it can be argued into silence; and out of that silence it is an easy thing to spell consent. Then when he has it Balaam seems half afraid of the permission he had been so eager to get. Of the two voices that spake within him, one was dumb with dread, and that [was] the voice that had urged him on. Ah, how true it all is about us today, men and women miserable because they cannot have their way, and then miserable because they have it, and afraid.

So Balaam goes on his way, which is a going out of his way, ready to spend his rage upon any unhappy creature that presents itself. And unfortunately when a man rides an ass he has not far to seek for the opportunity, especially if the ass stumbles. Suddenly the frightened beast swerved aside from off the road, and in his fury Balaam smote it. Again it stood and swerved, crushing the prophet's foot against the stone wall. And yet again the startled creature stood trembling in a narrow way, and then fell down. "If there were a sword in my hand I would kill you," cried the angry prophet. Then there appeared the angel of the LORD, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, . . . the donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live." This mystery of the ass speaking has hidden from us the great meaning of the incident. It may have been as many good men say it was, a dream; or it may have been in Balaam's mind only that the voice was heard; or it may be that He who giveth us speech can endow other animals with it. God's creatures are constantly reproving us if we had but ears to hear them. The mischief is not that they are dumb, but that we are deaf. But what concerns us is the terrible reproof in these words. It was like Balaam's doom. "A prophet of God! Balaam, the man whose eyes God has opened (24:3). And this is what you

have come to! Dimmer of eye and duller of sense than your donkey whom you have struck! *Your donkey saw me.* But you have blinded thyself: you don't see where you're going." Conscious that the light of God had gone out of him, Balaam cried, "I have sinned." He would have gone back again, but that could not be. The way of falsehood on which he has entered cannot be retraced. The awful price that must be paid for going wrong is this penalty of having to go on.

Now Balaam draws near to Moab, and at the borders of the country the king waits with his princes to welcome the great deliverer of their nation. There is a tone of reproof in the words of Balak, "Did I not earnestly send to you, calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?" But this man does not cringe in the presence of the king. His answer is a noble one, "Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak." How much of the true prophet there is in this man, how clear a vision he has of God, and of man's relation to God, appears in the account of this interview which is so strangely preserved in the book of Micah. "O My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counseled, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him . . . that you may know the righteousness of the LORD." Balak asks, "With what shall I come before the LORD, *and* bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, the fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul?" Then Balaam replies, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

And now they make preparation for the seer to work his spells and to curse those whom God hath blest. It is indeed a strange scene. At Balaam's bidding they erect seven altars and offer oxen and sheep, as if he would cover his lack of confidence by the greatness and grandeur of his ceremony. Together they king and the prophet climb the height of Moab. And there on some projecting rock he takes his stand bareheaded:

Your wild hair floating on the eastern breeze,
Your tranced yet open gaze,
Fixed on the desert haze,
As one who deep in heaven some airy pageant sees.

The stretch of the goodly land lay before him in all its vast expanse. Behind him the wilderness that stretched away to his own land. To the left rose the red mountains of Edom and Seir. The great and terrible desert gleamed to the south. Then came the deep shadows where the Jordan ran; and beyond there rolled the hills of Palestine, the white walled cities dotting the distant landscape. Far away to the north stood the snowy height of Lebanon. And beyond the western horizon he knew there lay the waters of the great sea, on which should come the ships of Chittim. And now his gaze is fixed upon the tents of Israel that spread below him, set in order amidst the acacia groves. It may be that the Pillar of Cloud rested upon them, seeming like the power that protected them against all evil. He stands and gazes in silence, dimly perceiving the great purpose of God concerning this people. His heart envies the blessing that awaits them. In silence he returns with the king to the altars, and there taking his place amongst the princes of Moab, there swept over him the spirit of prophecy as if some unseen hand smote the strings of that tuned soul:

"Behold the King of Moab hath brought me from Aram,
Out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, Come, defy Israel.
How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?
Or how shall I defy whom He hath not defied?
For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him:
Lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.
Who can count the dust of Jacob? And the number of the fourth part of Israel?
Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

In horror Balak cried, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed *them* bountifully!" Then came the answer of a prophet—"Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?" And yet with soul lusting for gain there is that about him which prompts Balak to make another effort. He will bring him to some place from which he can see but the uttermost part of this people, "and shall not see them all." There it may be that he can cheat God and curse Israel! So once more they stand on the rocky height, the king and the prophet. But again there sweeps within the seer's soul the wind of God, and he cried, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. as He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" And yet a third time Balak leads Balaam to another point, climbing the mount up which Moses went when he looked forth upon the great stretch of the goodly land. But again the prophet is powerless to breathe a breath of harm against this people. Balak indignant cried, "I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed *them* these three times!" And once more the prophet faced the king, and stood as with the nobility of former days. "If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will." And then in an outburst of most sublime poetry Balaam declared the completeness of Israel's triumph over the nations. *Then Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place.*

So we follow the prophet mounted on his ass and riding away into the wilderness towards his own country. And is it in the loneliness of the way that he begins to think of all that he has left, the splendour of the position, the great gain? Certain it is that he turns seeking Balak. With another face and bearing he takes the king aside. "Balak," he whispers, "this thing can be done, and I can yet deliver this people into your hand." The voice that had rolled in such majestic utterance now hisses in the damnable suggestion, "Let the women of Moab to amidst the men of Israel, and tempt them to the worship of their false gods, and to the observance of their foul festivals. If Israel be allured from the living God, then and then only shall Israel be undone." So does Balaam come to take his place among the princes of Balak. The silver and gold are his. The plot succeeds, and like a plague spreads the fascination of the idolatry. The men of Israel are mad in their vile devotion. Only the sternest punishment could stay the hideous sin, and in one day there fell no less than three and twenty thousand. The whole nation of Moab perished in the war that followed. And amongst them we read: "*They killed the kings of Midian . . . Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.*"

It is a grim story. But, alas, it is the story of hosts about us today, men who try to cheat God with altars and sacrifices and pious utterance, and yet grasp at gain by the curse and degradation of those about them. This is the man who cried, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Well has one said, and the words need to be spoken again and again, "Desire for personal salvation is not religion. It may go with religion, but it is not religion. Anxiety for the state of one's own soul is not the healthiest or best symptom. Of course, everyone wishes, 'Let me die the death of the righteous.' But it is one thing to wish to be saved; it is another to wish God's right to triumph; it is one thing to wish to die happy; it is another to wish to live holily. . . . It is possible to have sublime feelings, great passions, even great sympathies, and yet not to love man." The selfish motive can never find its satisfaction in Jesus Christ, either in this world or any other. To set Christ ever before us, our Example as well as our Saviour, to be through and through us true to Him, this and this only is our strength and safety.

THE DEATH OF MOSES

“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day.” —DEUT. 34:5-6.

THUS ends the story of Moses the man of God. Away in that lonely height; in sight of the goodly land, alone, utterly alone, he dies. Apart from the people whom he had loved and served so well, untended by wife or sons, he dies and is buried in an unknown grave. In all the world's history there is nothing more pathetic than the end of this wonderful life.

And if it is strange to us, to Israel it was a thousand-fold stranger. To the Jew the burial place was a matter of most sacred importance and careful provision. We recall the precise and solemn way in which Abraham purchased the tomb in the land promised to his seed. How great is the contrast between the death-bed of Jacob and the dying of Moses. Worn out by grief and years, the old patriarch, stretched upon his couch, gathers his sons about him, and his soul bursts into a song of prophecy and blessing. With tender looks of sympathy and all the ministries of love, those about him break the loneliness of death, as they link him through themselves to those latter days of which he tells. And when he has passed away the whole land is eager to do him honour. The skilful physicians embalm him. The Pharaohs themselves could scarcely be borne to their resting-place with more pomp than that with which they carry Jacob to the tomb of his fathers. There is a very great company of horsemen and chariots, and Joseph with all his house and will all the servants of Pharaoh swell the splendour of the occasion. Amidst such tokens of a people's reverence and devotion they carry him to his grave.

And it's stranger still to think that while Moses lies in his unknown grave there is another whom this people bring with them from Egypt, and bear through all their wanderings for forty years. The embalmed body of Joseph goes with them, waiting until they shall possess the land of promise and that he may be laid with his fathers.

In this very fact, isn't the reason for this lonely death and hidden grave attached to the sacred regard of the burial-place? Think of Moses as having led the people of Israel up into the land; think of him as having completed the conquest of the Canaanite; think of the tribes of Israel settled each in its appointed place;—and then Moses, the great warrior and leader with his work done and the hopes of the nation fulfilled, gathers the hosts together that he may bless them, and dies. With what stateliness should they bear him to his grave, his greatness magnified and hallowed by death. With what reverence should they regard his resting-place. Remember how constantly the heroes of other nations have become their gods; how naturally the tomb becomes an altar, and the shrine becomes a temple. There was never a hero that might more readily receive the idolatrous regard of a nation than Moses, whose memory was so immediately associated with their religion, to whom they owed their national existence, their very liberties, their lives, their hopes. How easily should the burial-place of such a saint and hero become a place of pilgrimage and an object of worship. Remember that 700 years afterwards Hezekiah is distinguished as the bold reformer who broke in pieces the serpent of brass which Moses had made. Until that day, we are told, *the children of Israel burned incense to it*. Thus is it that for Israel's sake Moses is led up the mountain height, away into that utter loneliness; and there he dies and God buries him, and no man knoweth the place of his sepulchre unto this day.

So was it that God fulfilled the supreme effort and desire of His servant's life—that Israel should worship God and Him only. If in some other existence Moses could have seen that the indulgence of his wish to enter Canaan had become the snare and curse of this people, how he would have bewailed it as the very undoing of his life-work. But his death, that seemed so mysterious and apparently so terrible a penalty, becomes the crowning mercy of his life.

Another reason for the lonely death and the hidden grave lies upon the very surface of the record—*Thus Moses died according to the word of the LORD*. It reaches back to the incident at Meribah, and its dreadful result and penalty. Let us recall the incident—how that Moses, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, has again approached the land of promise, and upon its border the people break out once more into rebellious murmurings. Dreading lest their sin should bar their entrance into the land, Moses speaks angrily to the people, and forgets himself, and forgets God in his vexation—“Shall we fetch water out of the rock for you rebels!” It is the word of a man who has lost hope and faith, and who begrudges the water that he’s going to give for such a miserable group as them. For this sin he is forbidden to enter the land of promise. Taking the case as it seems at first sight, we must surely feel that the penalty is out of all keeping with the offence. There are offences that in a leader are worse a thousand times than in a subordinate; but there are offences that are less in a leader than in another. In him who carries the responsibility and burden of the people, who has to arrange for them, who suffers most for their folly, reproof—even indignant and angry reproof—is much more excusable than from him who has neither burden nor responsibility. In this man who dreaded the result of their murmuring because his clear vision sees the nearness of the goodly land, and his righteousness perceives the peril of their sin as their dull spirits could not see it, this provocation might be more readily excused. That his life’s reward should be snatched from him, and his life’s hope extinguished, for such an offence is simply unthinkable. We must look at the incident in another light. We have seen how the death of Moses fulfilled the great purpose and spirit of his life in relation to the worship of the God of heaven. The second great foundation truth which Moses sought to set deep in the soul of Israel, and on which the religion of Israel was built, was the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the inevitable penalty that must follow it—that the wages of sin is death. To the Israelites sin had become a thing so common and so constant that they could scarcely perceive it in themselves. It needed to be brought out and largely written before the eyes of the people. It needed to stand out in all its blackness against the fair white ground of a noble and pure life. It needed to be graven in their souls by some great solemnity, wrought into them imperishably by some dread event and memory. With this purpose to be fulfilled, let us follow the story.

The whole congregation is gathered at the foot of the mountain. And in their midst stands Moses, the man of God, the great leader of Israel, the deliverer, the lawgiver, the very father of his people. But a little way off lay the goodly land that flowed with milk and honey, on which all his hopes and heart had been set. But the way is barred. *Moses the man of God must die*. Death is ever a solemn thing, even when old age totters feebly on towards the grave. Death is always sad, even when the little babe is snatched from the mother’s bosom, or the slave falls a corpse. But death was never so strange, so sad, so solemn, as here. No sickness had weakened Moses, no touch of feebleness was there on that noble form. The eye flashed undimmed in its brightness, and he stood as strong and as resolute as when of old he stood in the palace of Pharaoh. Yet he must die. Watched by that whole congregation in awful silence he begins to climb the mountain-side. With eyes dimmed with tears and hearts that smite them for their folly, they watch him step by step. *That is what sin means*. God did not spare Moses for his sin – Moses, His chosen and faithful servant, to whom He had talked face to face and by whom He had given the law. He, who had done more than any other to secure that goodly land—who had dared most, and toiled most, and suffered most—must never set foot within it. Moses must die. In that awful silence think how that great truth went down, down into the hearts of the people, impressing them as no suffering of their own could have done. Fire and earthquake, and stormy winds could never proclaim the exceeding sinfulness of sin as did the still small voice of that dread hour.

Far up the mountain-side there goes that receding figure. He stands upon the height and looks forth upon Israel his people; he sees the tents stretched below him; it may be, he lifts hands of blessing. And then he is gone. No mortal eye can follow him; no man knows the place of his sepulchre to this day. Then in the sorrow of the 30 days that they wept for Moses, that scene had time to be fixed for ever in their minds. From that day on, Israel is another nation.

The sight of that departure had uplifted the whole people. We feel as we enter upon the Book of Joshua that we have left the murmurings behind. It is a nation chastened and transformed that enters Canaan.

There is a sense in which the words are themselves fulfilled here—*It is expedient . . . that one man should die for the people* (John 11:50; 18:14). It was a service that only a noble man could render. *Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God*, is the utterance of such an one (Hebrews 10:7-9). And in the clearer light of a land, goodlier even than Canaan, with what abiding fulness of joy shall this brave servant of God see how the great of his life was fulfilled in the very manner of his death.

There is another aspect of the death of Moses full of a sublime significance. *It is the fitness for further and more glorious service*. Moses must go up that mount to proclaim the shame and anguish of sin; in the sight of all Israel he must go under the penalty of its curse, on to its bitter end of death.

But the vision of Moses fades, and there rises before us Another, One greater than Moses. He has gathered His disciples about Him and begun to show unto them what things should happen unto Him. How that He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes; and be killed. But they have no ears, no eyes for such sorrow, and Peter dares to rebuke His LORD. Then came a week's silence. And, it may be that, unless help comes from heaven, Christ would have sunk in that awful loneliness and agony—the human brain crushed beneath its load. Let us remember that three times in the life of the LORD Jesus this celestial ministry came to Him. Once when He was an hungered, and the angels brought Him food—once when the heart was overfull of grief and must have broken, as it brake upon the cross, if there had not come the angel strengthening Him. And now, when as we have said, the human brain had been crushed, unless He can find the relief that comes in sympathy, in utterance. And where can that be found? The angels can bring Him bread; they can bring Him strength. But it's not theirs to look into the mystery of our redemption. And of men who is there who can talk with Him? Who knows the depths into which His spirit sinks—the bitter curse, the anguish of that penalty and shame? *“And there appeared Moses and Elias talking with Him of the decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem.”*

Here is the great recompense of the reward. Here Moses finds that which explains and justifies and glorifies that lonely death on the mountain height.

How hard, how bitter was the word to Moses, “You shalt not pass over Jordan; your foot shall not set within its borders yet.” Wholly surrendered to that will, Moses goes up the mount to die. And through the ages he waits. And now the Christ is come. Now is that goodly land a thousand times more goodly since His feet have trod those blessed fields. And lo, there He faints, He sorrows. Now is the hour come. And lo, on the mountain height there in Canaan, beside His glorious LORD, Moses takes his stand. As if God had kept His servant until the King of Heaven should welcome him within its borders. Is it not true for every man and woman of us—that if any shall give himself up wholly to God, so that He can work out in us His own great purposes, there shall be accomplished sublime service than we dare ask or think? And if only God has His own way, death shall destroy nothing—shall wither no hope nor cheat us of our inheritance. It shall but fulfil the great services of our life, and the very manner of our death shall fit us for loftier service than we had dreamed of here. Therefore let us pray daily for this grace, to let God have His own way with us perfectly, so shall this perfect blessedness be ours. Amen.